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HOPE.

HOPE,

A Story of Chequered Life,

BY ALFRED W. COLE,

AUTHOR OF

“THE CAPE AND THE KAFFIRS,” ETC., ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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H O P E.

CHAPTER I.

“GOODNESS gracious—No!” exclaimed Mrs. Marsden, in reply to a question of her spouse’s. “In love with Mr. Tonks?—why it’s enough to turn the whole *mask* of my blood to think of such a thing.”

“Don’t be a fool,” said Mr. Marsden. “I didn’t ask you whether Fanny was in love with Mr. Tonks, but whether Mr. Tonks is not in love with *her*?”

“I’m sure he wouldn’t go and do such a thing,” replied Mrs. Marsden. “He is too quiet and well-behaved to think of such a thing.”

“Is every one badly behaved that falls in love, as you women call it?” asked her husband.

“Upon my word, Marsden, you ought to be ashamed—you, a married man, too—to go and ask such a question.”

“Why, you said so,” answered Marsden. “You said Mr. Tonks was too well-behaved to fall in love.”

“Yes, with Fanny, I said,” replied Mrs. Marsden; “because Fanny’s likely to set her cap at something higher than Mr. Tonks, I should think.”

“Is she going to marry a duke?” asked her husband with a sneer.

“Now don’t talk nonsense, Marsden—you know what I mean. Why, Mr. Tonks is only a newspaper writer, you know.”

“And your Mr. Nugent is a book-writer, you know—what’s the difference?”

“Mr. Nugent is a real gentleman,” replied Mrs. Marsden, warmly.

“What’s the use of that without the cash?” said Marsden.

“But he *will* have cash,” said his wife. “He’ll be sure to have plenty of money.”

“I don’t think so,” replied Marsden; “how should he?”

“Well, how should Mr. Tonks have any money?” said Mrs. Marsden, taking up a very feminine style of argument.

“I didn’t say he *would* have,” replied her husband; “but he *may*, and I may know a little more about that matter than you do, mind you.” And here Mr. Marsden looked so mysteriously at his wife, that the latter only stared and said, “Lor!”

“Now, look you here,” said Marsden, after a pause. “Don’t you go and put your spoke in the wheel, to prevent Fanny from taking notice of this Mr. Tonks, because if you do, you’ll chance to spoil her fortune—I tell you that. And, more than that, don’t go and chatter about

what I've been saying, or you'll spoil all our fortunes, as sure as my name's Marsden."

Having delivered this oracularly ambiguous speech, Mr. Marsden left the room, well knowing that further discussion would be useless, and that his wife would be quite certain to follow the hints he had given her. Mrs. Marsden, indeed, remained in a great state of bewilderment, but with a vague notion that Mr. David Tonks was to turn out a duke in disguise, as she had seen at the *the-aytre*, and that Fanny might be a duchess if she made haste, and managed things according to her husband's wishes.

Mr. Marsden was a cunning fellow. He had, as the reader will remember, a certain will in his possession, as security for a loan he had made to Mr. Frisby; and at first, Mr. Marsden had looked upon this will in no other light than as such security—at least, so far as his own personal interests were concerned. But after a time, a new light broke upon him. Meeting David Tonks at his own house, he had taken the

liberty of putting a few questions to him, just to find out his birth-place, &c. The answers confirmed his suspicion, that David might be the real Simon Pure interested in the will. So far, however, it would make no difference to Mr. Marsden's views whether David were or were not the man. He communicated his suspicions to Mr. Frisby, and Mr. Frisby had satisfied himself in his conversation with the widow, that David was the defrauded son of old 'Tonks, the tailor. When Marsden heard this, he still had no thoughts, at first, of changing the course he had promised Frisby to adopt. But Mr. Marsden was not a man to lose sight of his own interests for any considerations of pledging his word, and so on; and, therefore, he began to discuss in his own mind, whether he might not make a "better thing" of it by taking up David's cause.

Certainly there appeared a reasonable probability that David would be very grateful, and "do the handsome" to the man who should help him to his rights; but then, again, it would,

at all events, cost Mr. Marsden one hundred pounds, which he was sure to get from Frisby if he helped *him*, and sure to lose if he did not. Moreover, there was the difficulty of his accounting for his possession of the will ; for were he to reveal the truth, he would prove himself guilty of a very ugly conspiracy, and after David's first burst of gratitude was over, might he not turn round and prosecute him for his roguery ? There was danger, decidedly.

Subsequently, another idea took possession of Mr. Marsden's mind. Supposing he should induce Tonks to marry his daughter ? Then he would secure a fortune for Fanny through her husband, and David would never think of prosecuting his own father-in-law. This scheme pleased him vastly ; especially, as by watching, he became convinced that David was " spooney," as he phrased it, on Fanny. It is true that he detected no appearance of a reciprocal feeling on the part of his daughter ; but he did not care much about that. His theory was, that every man, and every

woman, too, will do any thing for money, and especially such a trifling thing as marrying without affection. He had no doubt, therefore, that Fanny would smile upon David's suit fast enough, when she knew that he was a man of property—"and if not, she must be made—that's all—" was the conclusion.

Frisby was kept in blissful ignorance of this plot against his own scheme of marrying the widow. Indeed, Frisby was anxious, if possible, to win that lady's affection and secure her in marriage without using any threat at all. He was a mild man though a rogue, and had no great fancy for a tremendous scene, and for threatening a woman into matrimony with him. He looked upon his production of the will as a *dernier resort*, in case his personal fascination failed to win the widow's heart; and he felt, that if he only gained her consent by its means, she would probably revenge herself on him after matrimony, by leading a "cat and dog" life with him. Frisby had an uphill battle to fight; for

the widow, in reality, hated him. At the same time, she had just a faint idea, that he knew a little too much about her former husband and her husband's son, and was rather afraid of him in consequence : so that she always received him with smiles, and listened to his flatteries, as if she were greatly delighted with them. In spite of all this, Frisby found he did not make way, and was getting very impatient indeed, when he was suddenly called away from Haslop Hall, to accompany his master on a visit to Townley Park.

Meanwhile, David Tonks had been getting deeper and deeper in love with Fanny Marsden ; but poor David could not raise a passion in return. He became more than ever convinced that Fanny was attached to Frank Nugent ; and when he compared himself with that young gentleman, he felt how inferior he was to him in the qualities most likely to attract a young girl. But David did not love one bit the less for all this ; love was not with him a mere article

of barter, for which he must get an equivalent in return, or refuse to part with any. He loved because he could not help it.

On the very evening of Mrs. Marsden's conversation with her husband, touching David Tonks, that gentleman called at their house.

"I got a letter from Mr. Nugent this morning, and I thought you'd like to hear of him," said David, after shaking hands with them.

"La! yes. I'm sure I hope he's enjoying himself," said Mrs. Marsden.

"So it seems," replied David. "He says he's very well indeed, and they have plenty of company in the house, and he gets good shooting. But I'm sorry to say I don't hear that he's at work at any new book, and I'm sorry for that, because I want him to do something great, as I'm sure he *can* do."

"Of course he can," said Mrs. Marsden; "besides, if he's done a small book, why can't he do a large one? It only takes a longer time, I suppose, don't it, Mr. Tonks?"

David smiled, and said "Yes;" but was greatly amused at the good woman taking his expression in its most literal sense.

"Are there many ladies where Mr. Nugent is staying?" asked Fanny.

"Several," replied David.

"Are they all old—I mean married?"

"Lawk a mercy!" exclaimed Mrs. Marsden; "can't a lady be married without being old—indeed?"

"There are two or three single ones, I believe," said David. "I know there's Miss Danvers."

"Miss Danvers!" said Fanny; "that's the name of ——"

"The name of what?" cried her mother, as Fanny stopped suddenly. "It's the name of the baker that used to keep the shop at the corner of William Street, before this one came. Daniels; I recollect him quite well; he had a wife that used to drink, and drove him a'most mad, with a red nose."

“ Mr. Tonks said Danvers, mamma,” observed Fanny.

“ Well, there ain’t much difference, I’m sure, if you say them quick,” replied Mrs. Marsden. “ Then who did you mean it’s the name of ? ”

“ I think it’s the name of the gentleman that followed me, and— ”

“ So it is, I do declare ! ” exclaimed her mother. “ Mr. Nugent said he was a gentleman, though in course he was elevated. ”

“ Does he say anything about Miss Danvers ? ” asked Fanny, rather timidly.

“ He says she is very handsome, and very clever,” replied David. “ I think that’s all. ”

All ! wasn’t it enough, Mr. David Tonks ? did it not set Miss Fanny Marsden to work, dreaming and thinking, and making imaginary portraits of Miss Danvers, with every feature formed according to Fanny’s idea of perfection, and exactly unlike Fanny’s own features ?

“ Is she rich, I wonder ? ” asked Mrs. Marsden.

“ I don’t know,” replied David.

“ I hope she is,” continued Mrs. Marsden, “ and then perhaps he’ll marry her ; I’m sure he’s fit for any lady in the land, and I should like to see him with a rich wife, wouldn’t you, Fanny ?”

“ Ye—s,” said Fanny ; but it really was such a faint, lame little word, as Fanny pronounced it, that we are not sure whether an indifferent person would not have suspected that Fanny was telling a fib.

Just at this moment, a bell rang twice. Mrs. Marsden got up, in a state of trouble, declaring that “ The first floors were ringing themselves black in the face, and that lazy Jemima wouldn’t go and see to them.” So she bustled out of the room to stir up Jemima, or restore the complexion of the first floors herself.

“ I am going to write to Mr. Nugent to-morrow,” said David, when he and Fanny were alone.

“ Are you ?” said Fanny : and Fanny said so, because she did not know what else to say.

“Yes,” continued David; “haven’t you any message to send?”

“N—o,” said Fanny, as tremulously as she had before uttered her little affirmative.

“I thought you might like to be remembered to him,” said David, “especially as he desired to be remembered to you.”

“Did he?” said Fanny, very quickly.

“Yes,” replied David; “I’ll show it you—here’s the letter. Here it is, you see:—‘Remember me to Mrs. Marsden and Miss Fanny.’”

Fanny felt almost inclined to cry. She had been so pleased just before, but the adjunct of her mother’s name to her own altered every thing.

“You can tell him that mamma and I desire to be remembered to *him*,” said Fanny, almost with a spice of bitterness in her tone.

David didn’t understand it at all.

“I won’t forget it,” said David. “I must say good-bye now, for it’s the evening that I have night-work to do.”

“ Good-bye,” said Fanny, shaking hands with him.

David was just going out of the room. “ Stay, Mr. Tonks,” cried Fanny, “ you’ve dropped something ; you must have pulled it out of your pocket with Mr. Nugent’s letter ;” and she handed him a little piece of silk netting, a mere fragment.

“ Thank you—thank you,” said David, hurriedly, and thrusting it into his pocket, while he reddened wonderfully.

All on a sudden, Fanny reddened too. She looked at David, and David looked down, and then Fanny looked down : for Fanny recollected now, that this bit of silk netting was part of a piece of work that she spoilt in beginning, and had thrown on the floor. Mr. Tonks must have picked it up, and Mr. Tonks had carried it in his breast-pocket, next his heart. All this flashed across Fanny’s mind in an instant, and at the same instant it flashed across David’s mind that his love was found out. And Fanny had

never suspected such a thing before ! And David had never thought of the possibility of Fanny finding out his love unless he told her of it ! And here was a full discovery on both sides in one single instant.

It is a perfect mystery to David how he got out of the room that day. He has never been able to recollect whether he went backwards or forwards, or sideways, like a crab. And Fanny couldn't help him in the mystery, for Fanny knew no more than he.

CHAPTER II.

AMONG those who troubled themselves most to account for Dashwood's sudden departure from Townley Park, was Mr. Frank Nugent. We cannot add that he was very successful in his conjectures. First he guessed that Captain Dashwood had proposed to Flora Danvers, and been rejected. This was decidedly a pleasant surmise. A formidable rival removed from the field left him a better chance of success, if he can be said to have seriously contemplated the attainment of it. It was a pity, for the sake of Mr. Frank Nugent's happiness, that he could not rest satisfied with this surmise. But there were circumstances that seemed to militate against it.

In the first place, Flora *ought* to have looked happier, if she had got rid of an unwelcome suitor ; but it was a fact which Frank could not disguise from himself, that Flora looked less well and less happy every day of her life. There was a nervousness of manner about her, which Frank's surmise could not account for ; she seemed like a person in constant dread of some secret danger ; or like one oppressed with troublous thoughts which were almost driving her to madness, and which yet she dared not reveal ; for is not a sorrow confided a sorrow half relieved ?

His next guess was exactly the reverse of the first—that Flora had accepted Dashwood, and was wretched for having done so. This supposition had a spice of consolation in it also, for it showed that Flora did not love this rival ; but, on the other hand, was she likely to shrink from the consequences of her pledge ? Was she not too high-souled and too firm to retract her promise ? Yes : but then, again, if so high-souled, why should she accept a man whom she did not

love? There lay the mystery and the doubt. And it must also be allowed that accepted lovers are not in the habit of running away from their affianced brides by the first express-train after the vows have been plighted. There again was a mystery and a doubt.

So Frank Nugent oscillated between his two surmises, now inclining to one, now devoutly believing in the other, now half happy in the latter, now half miserable in the former.

He discussed the matter with Mrs. St. Leger several times, but she could form no more decisive opinion than himself, for Flora had made no confidant of her in the matter. One thing she had ascertained, however, that Dashwood had had a private interview with Flora a few hours before his departure: and further, that Flora was ignorant of whither Dashwood had gone. This last circumstance seemed to favour the idea of the rejection, and Mrs. St. Leger herself decidedly inclined to it.

The rest of the party made a few remarks on

it. The Misses Fluke laughed at the idea of the gallant Captain running away directly he was rejected, unable to face the lady even at the dinner table. Lady Emily thought Captain Dashwood's conduct extraordinary in a person of his excellent breeding. Lady Fluke was surprised that Miss Danvers should have given Captain Dashwood so much encouragement as she always had done; forgetting that her own sweet daughters were giving everybody a great deal of encouragement at all times—but then, to be sure, they were not likely to reject any one who could decently support them. Even Tom Saville joined in the chorus of whisperers, and made his friend Frank very uncomfortable by his remarks.

“I shouldn't have thought it of Flora Danvers,” he said to Frank when they were alone, “for she really *did* carry on rather strongly with Dashwood, didn't she?”

“I don't think so at all,” replied Frank: “besides which, you seem to be driving at a conclusion most unwarrantably.”

“How do you mean? What conclusion?” asked Tom.

“I suppose you mean that Miss Danvers has refused an offer from Captain Dashwood?” replied Frank.

“I should rather think so,” said Tom Saville; “why, my good fellow, there isn’t the ghost of a doubt on the subject.”

“Indeed! how so?”

“How so? How can you ask such a question? Hasn’t Dashwood been dangling after the young lady, riding with her, sketching for her, singing to her and for her, and by a thousand nameless little attentions (which Dashwood *does* know how to pay, devilish cleverly, I admit,) proving that he was head over ears in love with the girl? I understand these cool fellows well. They keep up a quiet, unchangeable sort of face; they take more pains to conceal every sort of emotion than all their emotions are worth; they don’t go straight-forwardly to work, and attack a girl’s heart as a soldier does a fortress; but they give

a meaning smile now and then, visible only to the young lady herself, and highly valuable from its rarity ; they render themselves conspicuous by faultless good breeding, by never saying a silly thing, and never attempting to say a good one ; they dress with all taste and elegance, and avoid everything in conversation or habits that could make the most fastidious female's nose curl ; and so they contrive to do what they aim at—make a woman fall in love with them—not shew by word or action that *they* have fallen in love with her. This is the game Dashwood has been playing skilfully enough. I did not think it would succeed at first, because I have a high opinion of Flora's good sense ; but I saw reason to doubt that afterwards. I saw that she was more with him than was absolutely necessary ; that it seemed as if some kind of confidence was established between them ; that she looked confused at certain glances of his, and so forth. Then came the mysterious illness when they were out riding alone ; the very next day comes a

private interview, bearing every appearance of being preconcerted; and then suddenly the gallant Captain is found missing, without a word of previous warning. The thing's too clear—he proposed when they were out riding, and he did not get a satisfactory reply.—Women have an awkward habit of fainting just when a man wants them to say a single word—the next day he repeats his proposal, and *does* get an answer, and a different one from what he might have reckoned on. And so, in sorrow or in anger, (but I'd bet on the latter with such a fellow as Dashwood) he rushes away to bemoan his fate or concoct his revenge."

"It may appear very clear to you, I have no doubt," said Frank, "but I cannot agree with you at all. You surely must have remarked that Miss Danvers looks unwell, and is in very bad spirits. Is it likely she would be so, if she had got rid of an unwelcome lover?"

"*Very* likely, if she repents her refusal now that it is too late," replied Saville coolly.

“Repents !” exclaimed Frank, indignantly. The truth is, that this was a view of the case which had never yet struck Frank, and it made him very savage when it was thus presented to him.

“Why not ?” said Tom ; “she is not the first woman who has said ‘no,’ and five minutes afterwards wished she had said ‘yes.’”

“Miss Danvers has too much decision of character for such weakness,” replied Frank.

“Perhaps so,” said Saville : “but I will tell you a secret, Mr. Frank Nugent. Hang me, if I don’t suspect you of being in love with Flora Danvers yourself.”

“You’re in a satirical humour,” said Frank, smiling, but feeling like a detected pickpocket.

“No, I’m not ; but I’m in a shrewdly guessing humour, and by Jove ! I’m right this time. Why, Frank, you’re as red as old Fluke’s nose, and look as bashful as Jeffries when one of the ‘pets’ treads on his toes under the table.”

“ ’Pon my word, Saville, it’s too bad of you to talk in that way—as if any young lady would do such a thing !”

“ Miss Minnie or Miss Jenny would,” said Tom ; “ why, man, I got one of the pressures of Miss Minnie’s foot meant for Jeffries, who was next me at the loo-table the other night, while you were prosing with Mrs. St. Leger. And what do you think I did ?”

“ What ?” asked Frank, quite glad that the conversation was turning away from his own affairs.

“ Returned it, of course,” said Tom ; “ and I think I must have hit on a corn ; for Minnie made a dreadful wry face, and uttered a little squeak. But that’s not the point ; I say that you’re in love, Nugent. Now don’t deny it.”

“ What can have put such a fancy into your head ?” said Frank.

“ Never mind,” replied Saville. “ It’s a fact, and I know it. Moreover, Frank, I approve of your taste, and if I were not a poor devil of a

younger brother, I don't know but that I should have made an attempt to fascinate the fair Flora myself. As it is, I must look out for a fortune, or remain a wretched bachelor."

"And what must I do?" said Frank. "At all events, you are ten times more eligible than myself."

"Not a bit of it," answered Saville. "I am a younger son, with a healthy elder brother. It's true he travels in company with a parson and a doctor, and how any man can survive that, is a mystery to me; it's my only chance, Frank: but I don't reckon it, I assure you, though there's no great stock of affection between Ned and myself. Well; you are an author—a poor one perhaps—but what of that? The whole world is open to you. Think what mind may accomplish in this age of enlightenment—think what it *has* accomplished. Run over the list of great, wealthy, and even noble individuals, who have achieved their greatness, wealth, and nobility solely from brains, and say, what is there you

may not hope for, with talents such as yours, and energy and determination?"

"Presuming I have the talents that the partiality of a friend assigns me," said Nugent, laughing.

"Nonsense about the partiality," exclaimed Saville. "Partiality never made one man think another a genius when he was a fool, though it may have made him paint him in brighter colours than the true ones to others. But there is no doubt of it, Frank; you have given the proofs to the world, and the world has accepted them. I tell you there is nothing you may not hope for—nothing at which you may not aim with a chance, and a fair chance too, of success."

"I have written one little book," said Frank, "which has certainly had as much success as it deserves. Are these the proofs, my dear Saville?"

"Yes; but you don't state them fairly. You have written a book (which I *have* read, Frank, with as much pleasure, and with as much attention, as those who talk more about it), in which

all who have read it, see not only talent, but the clearest evidence of the existence of far higher powers in the author's mind than he has yet brought into play. You have never *worked* yet, Frank—it has been mere child's play.”

“ I don't know about that ; it cost me some trouble, and more anxiety than you may think for, to write even that little book.”

“ Because it was your first, and you were thinking too much of your audience, as the actors say. Resolve to do great things—what you know and feel to be great ; but never trouble yourself, while you are about them, what the world will think of them.”

Frank smiled. “ If you give such good advice, why have you not acted in accordance with it ?” he asked.

“ Because it is easier to give advice, and good advice too, than to follow it. Because I know the road to greatness, but know that it is too arduous an one for me ; because I know the competitors that are entered for the race for fame, and feel

that I am too dull of brain and slow of foot to compete with them."

"You underrate your own attainments as much as you exalt mine," said Frank: "but, my dear Saville, even if all you say be true, how would it help me, in case of my being in love with Flora Danvers? Could I propose to her, and offer to maintain her in the station she was born in, out of my resolutions to be a great man? Could I repeat the offer afterwards to her mother and sensible father? Or should I not prove myself better fitted for a cell in Bedlam than a niche in the Temple of Fame, if I committed such an absurdity?"

"No doubt; but I don't reckon on your doing any thing of the kind. I suppose that if you are in love with Flora Danvers, you will strive heart and soul to be worthy of her in worldly position, as you are in every thing else. If a man cannot accomplish great things with such an incitement as love, his case is hopeless indeed. But it must not be sighing, feeling,

sentimental love ; but a thoroughly noble, manly passion, such as you are capable of. The man who has endured privations, and manfully struggled against ill-fortune like yourself, Frank Nugent, ay, and brought away from the struggle as pure a heart as he took into it—I say that man is capable of the noblest passions that ever added dignity to manhood, as love in all its strength and purity does.”

“ I confess your eloquence on the subject infects me, Saville, and I almost feel as if I were about to accomplish all that you predict.”

“ And so you will,” exclaimed Saville. “ It wants but faith, Frank—faith and perseverance—if, indeed, faith does not include that, and almost every other virtue.”

“ I am afraid that it wants a great many other things,” said Frank ; “ but do you really mean to say that you would consider me, even with your own flattering estimation of my character, an eligible suitor for Miss Danvers.”

“ Certainly not, according to the term as ge-

nerally understood," replied Saville ; " but I see no reason why you should not become so hereafter. Think how many men have made fortunes from a mere wish to become rich. You have a far higher motive, and therefore ought to have a far greater energy. But to treat matters plainly, Frank : if you are in love with Flora Danvers, as I verily believe, and will therefore conclude to be the case, you have tough work before you ; first to gain the lady's affection (for I don't think you have got that yet) ; secondly, to gain her parent's consent ; and thirdly, to be in a position to deserve it. After all, the last is the great work—persevere, and don't despair : and without pretending to the character of prophet, Tom Saville will bet on your success in a couple of years from this time, provided, of course, that the lady says ' Yes,' and will wait so long. And now, Frank, I'll go and beat old Fluke at billiards, by way of reminding you that I'm only ' Tom Slack,' and not, as you may have begun to fancy, a grave old lecturer, doing a little private practice."

CHAPTER III.

THE private theatricals were not forgotten at Townley Park, though one of the chief "officials" in getting them up was removed from the scene of action. Gerard Mowbray was installed, *vice* Dashwood "retired," by general consent. One or two hinted that Mowbray was trying to be installed in another position, vacated by Dashwood, as favoured admirer of Miss Flora Danvers. It may be so, but we won't inquire into the matter just now.

A great deal of discussion took place as to the play that should be represented. The old stock of pieces usually favoured by amateurs was run over, but some objection was found to each. One

had too many characters, another not enough : one had too few ladies, another too many. At last Frank Nugent suggested Shakespeare's "Love's Labour's Lost." As it was one of Shakespeare's, of course every one pretended to know all about it, though, in truth, a great many of the party had never read it, and no one had seen it acted. The last was considered an objection, because people would not know how to treat the different characters. Frank suggested that there was the more room for originality on that account, as they could not give mere bad imitations of the conventional style current on the stage ; but the "pets" thought this decidedly disagreeable, unless Mr. Nugent would himself help them in the matter. Perhaps Frank's suggestion was not the happiest in the world, for, though the play contains many of Shakespeare's beauties, it contains them in a less degree than the very same ones may be found in other plays. "Biron and Rosaline," for example, are but weaker editions of "Benedick and Beatrice."

But, altogether, it was not considered a bad suggestion. The play was not very long—not difficult to learn ; it was of a refined caste, and had nothing violent about it. The ending was considered unsatisfactory, as it decidedly must have been for the gentlemen in it ; but, after all, there was something humorous in the idea of sending each lover off for a twelvemonth's probation. Tom Saville hinted that Frank must have been thinking of his own possible destiny ; at which Frank smiled, and looked confused.

The suggestion, however, was agreed to, and "Love's Labour's Lost" decided on as the first play to be acted by the amateur company assembled at Townley Park.

Then came the choice of characters. Every one wanted one that some one else wanted. Ambition guided some in their choice, vanity others, modesty others, and laziness several. Miss Minnie and Miss Jenny were each anxious to secure the heroine's part (if Rosaline be the heroine, which we doubt), but Rosaline with

a Cork accent was not considered *comme il faut*, though the Misses Fluke were not so informed. Tom Saville positively refused to take any character that was troublesome to learn; he was offered Costard, and accepted it. A sort of committee was elected to decide on these matters. They held mysterious meetings, and sat with closed doors—the “reporters and the public” being rigidly excluded. The result of their deliberations was the following programme:—

<i>King</i>	Mr. Gerard Mowbray.
<i>Biron</i>	Mr. Frank Nugent.
<i>Longueville</i>	Mr. Linton.
<i>Dumain</i>	Mr. Jeffries.
<i>Boyet</i>	Mr. St. Leger.
<i>Mercade</i>	Colonel Danvers.
<i>Costard</i>	Hon. Thomas Saville.
<i>Don Adriano de</i>	
<i>Armado</i>	Lord Shuckburgh.
	&c. &c.
<i>Princess of France</i>	Mrs. St. Leger.

<i>Rosaline</i>	. . .	Miss Flora Danvers.
<i>Maria</i>	. . .	Miss Minnie Fluke.
<i>Catherine</i>	. . .	Miss Jenny Fluke.

The programme also assigned the minor characters to certain visitors who were hereafter expected, but would not be in time to study the more important parts. It did not give satisfaction, as reports of select committees seldom do ; but no one openly murmured. The idea of putting the rather pompous Lord Shuckburgh into the part of the *very* pompous Armado, was considered to be a sly quiz on his Lordship ; but *he* did not perceive it. On the contrary, it is doubtful whether he did not think the magniloquent Spaniard a very natural character, and certainly it would have cost him no very great effort to represent him faithfully. Perhaps the Misses Fluke were the two least pleased of the party, and yet they had quite as good characters as they were fitted for.

A great many letters were written to costumiers

and milliners in town, as soon as the piece was cast ; but here again it became necessary to call in the aid of a committee of taste, lest the costumes should be more various than consistent with each other in time and place. There was danger of Miss Minnie and Miss Jenny turning out in a mixture of *moyen-age* and nineteenth century Parisian, by no means in keeping with the rest of the characters.

Lady Fluke had declined to act—but Lady Fluke came out very strongly in advice on the subject of the play and the dresses. She got Planché's book on costumes, and "crammed" from it, and then gave her opinion in the most oracular style. She even suggested an alteration of the catastrophe of the play, and would, perhaps, have volunteered to write it herself, but that it was considered imprudent to attempt such a thing. Our ancestors liked Garrick and Colley Cibber, but we are so antiquated in our tastes, as to prefer Shakspeare himself. So Lady Fluke's alterations and emendations were not accepted.

It was a matter of some surprise how Frank Nugent got the character of Biron instead of Gerard Mowbray. Some people entertained a slight doubt as to Frank being possessed of sufficient animal spirits to do justice to so sprightly a character. They fancied that a man cannot have wit and liveliness unless he is eternally cracking jokes, or making a fool of himself for the entertainment of the company. Frank had a very fair stock of those useful things called, as aforesaid, animal spirits. How else would he have endured poverty and privation as he had done? How else could he have struggled on, hoping even against the fair semblance of hope? How else could he have dashed off, month after month, the merry, jovial, laughable little sketches which pleased the magazine readers, while he was surrounded by cares and troubles enough to have made a less mercurial being sit and mope himself to death? But then the company assembled at Townley Park, knew nothing of all this—excepting Tom Saville, and Mrs. St. Leger ;

and indeed it was to the influence of the latter, that Frank owed the assignment to him of the character of Biron.

Lady Fluke had great doubts whether Miss Danvers was at all adapted to the lively character of Rosaline. In good sooth, Flora did not seem to be fit for the undertaking ; but Mrs. St. Leger pressed her not to refuse. She thought that whatever might be the cause of Flora's secret melancholy, a little distraction of her thoughts could not but benefit her, and the study and rehearsal of so lively a part as that of the gay heroine of " Love's Labour's Lost," was just fitted to accomplish that purpose. So, spite of a few remonstrances, Flora was obliged to consent to try her best, to the infinite satisfaction of Mr. Frank Nugent.

As for Frank himself, he studied his part *con amore*, and was perfectly well " up " in it before the rest of them had learnt their first dozen sentences. " Acting copies " of the play were procured from London. The committee first went

over them, and struck out such minor scenes as they intended to omit, and such expressions as might be scarcely admissible among amateurs. And then they resolved to read it all together—that is to say, each one, with the book in his or her hand, sitting together, and reading their sentences in turn as they came. A great deal of amusement in a small way was afforded by the wrong voice constantly chiming in, and Tom Saville maliciously answered Frank very often when Miss Danvers should have done so, which Frank considered bad manners of Tom, and Tom excused on the ground that Costard was but a clown.

“You read your part well, Frank, and Miss Danvers fully appreciated it,” he said, one evening, in Frank’s room.

“Nonsense,” replied Frank.

“I tell you she did. She began looking as melancholy as usual; but by degrees she paid attention to the play. I saw her fixing her large blue eyes on you as you read, and in one or two

of your last speeches they were lighted up with pleasure, till, I swear, I began to think the fictitious Biron was making as much impression on the fictitious Rosaline, as ever the original did on the fair Frenchwoman."

Frank looked becomingly modest—protested against such absurdities—but felt desperately pleased, nevertheless, and strongly disposed to hope they might be true.

"I tell you it's true, Frank : and as soon as Miss Danvers gets over the Dashwood nightmare (I wonder what the deuce it all means ?) —if you persevere like a man, I hope you'll eventually play a part in Love's Labour's *not* Lost."

CHAPTER IV.

FLORA DANVERS was completely mystified by the sudden departure of Dashwood. She had every reason to suspect that it was in consequence of something which had taken place between him and Mowbray, for she recollected the expression of Mowbray's face on first seeing Dashwood, and his assertion that he knew him, "but not by that name." And yet Mowbray had never from that moment alluded to his knowledge of Dashwood, when the name of the latter was mentioned by any of the party, nor had he ever spoken to her in reference to the scene in the library.

This seemed unaccountable to her, and made

her almost suspect that her ears had deceived her, in the confusion in which she naturally was when Mowbray so suddenly appeared before her, and that he could not really be acquainted with Captain Dashwood. But if so, she was still more puzzled to conceive why the latter had so abruptly left Townley Park. She had not refused him—neither had she accepted him; and though she knew well enough which she was about to do, she neither believed it possible that Dashwood could have divined the answer, or that he would have run away in consequence of it.

His departure would have been the greatest relief to her, except for the state of doubt and suspense in which his absence left her about Lionel's affairs. She had entrusted him with the horrible secret of the forgery. Altogether, she was not sorry that she had done so; for had she been silent, she felt sure that he would have learnt the truth in the natural course of events, and when too late to prevent the most fearful consequences, while at present there was at least a

chance of his keeping the secret. She hardly thought that any revengeful feeling against herself would make him resolve on the ruin of her brother—even if he *felt* revenge for her supposed rejection of his suit. And yet it was not to be anticipated that he would lose the double sum he had advanced to Lionel. How ardently she longed for the means of repaying him! She thought that if she could procure the money, she might remit it to him in her father's name: but then the *answer* would come to her father. Even if she could prevent that, how should she know what sum to send? for in her terrible agitation she had never noticed the amount of the bill upon her father.

Poor Flora! she who had been so open-hearted, who all her life had preached perfect candour and straightforwardness to her brother, now found herself daily plotting and concocting schemes for the salvation of that unhappy youth. It was a sickening feeling, to be conscious that she was thus brooding on plans of deception. But even

that feeling was less painful than the horror and detestation with which she regarded Lionel's crime : and yet she could not shake him off : she could not abandon him to his fate, guilty and degraded as he was. The natural affections were stronger than even her hatred of vice.

She had written to Lionel, not, of course, on the terrible subject that was uppermost in her mind, but to ascertain whether Dashwood had returned to the regiment. She had received a reply from her brother, expressing his surprise at hearing that Dashwood had left Townley Park : he had supposed him to be still there, and had not heard anything of or from him. He concluded by assuring Flora that he had lately been living very steadily—that he had sold a couple of hunters well, and had lodged £300 to Dashwood's account with the agents, on account of the £500 he owed him. He said he was quite sure this piece of information would please his dear little sister, and still more would she rejoice to hear

that he expected to get rid of all his difficulties within a year.

“He is mad!” exclaimed Flora to herself, when she read the letter, “or is adding still more to his fearful list of deceptions.”

Lionel, however, was invited to Townley Park, and was expected to arrive in about a fortnight’s time, and Flora entertained some hopes of being able to bring him to his senses, and to avert the worst, even without revealing her own knowledge of the forgery, which she felt sure would only precipitate mischief.

In the mean time, she felt greatly disposed to confide in Mrs. St. Leger to a certain extent; not to reveal the worst of Lionel’s misdeeds, but to tell enough to account for her interview with Dashwood in the library, the knowledge of which, she feared must have lowered her in her kind friend’s estimation.

One morning, after breakfast, she whispered to Mrs. St. Leger that she should like to talk to her alone.

“ Come to my room, dearest girl, at once,” said Mrs. St. Leger.

When they were alone, Flora began :—

“ I know you think me very deceptive, my dear Mrs. St. Leger, and it is natural enough that you should ; but it is not so, I assure you.”

“ I think nothing of the kind, Flora ; and if you mean to tell me that you have called me into my room to make such naughty accusations against me, I shall say that you don’t deserve a moment’s further audience.”

Flora smiled, as she said, “ If you have *not* considered me so, you have more charity than any of your guests, for I am sure they *all* suspect me of what is not the case.”

“ I don’t know what *some* of them may think, my dear child, and I really don’t think you need trouble yourself about their opinions ; but I can answer for *one* of them believing no ill of you, though all the world else should shout your sins into his ears.”

“ Whom do you mean ? ” asked Flora, hastily.

“ Never mind now,” replied Mrs. St. Leger, smiling, “ I am not here to be questioned, but to listen : so proceed, Mademoiselle, if you please.”

“ It is about my interview with Captain Dashwood in the library, on the day of his departure from here ; perhaps you may have heard of it ? ”

“ Yes ; go on.”

“ How strange you must have thought it ! But yet I assure you that I was not there to hear a proposal ; it was about my brother Lionel’s affairs that I had to listen.”

“ About Lionel ? ” said Mrs. St. Leger, in some surprise.

“ Yes,” continued Flora. “ Captain Dashwood has been very kind to my brother. You know that Lionel is very extravagant. I fear he is in serious difficulties, and I was anxious to know the extent of them, and to see what could be done.”

“ Pardon me for interrupting you, my child,”

said Mrs. St. Leger. "You say that Captain Dashwood has been very kind to your brother. Do you mind me asking whether he has lent your brother money?"

"He has," replied Flora.

"I don't like that," said Mrs. St. Leger, abruptly.

"Nor I—was it not sad of Lionel to borrow it?" said Flora.

"I was not thinking of that," replied her friend; "it was of Captain Dashwood *lending* it, that I thought. I do not like this, Flora. That man would not lend money to oblige a friend—the idea is preposterous. There is some other object in view."

"What other object *could* there be?" asked Flora.

"Lionel has a sister," replied Mrs. St. Leger, significantly.

Flora looked down and answered nothing.

"Dearest Flora, I tell you again that I do not want to force your confidence. But I cannot

possibly advise you well, or form any distinct judgment on what I hear, without I know more than I do at present. Even then I may not be able to serve you, so that you must pause before you decide on giving me any further information."

"I do not wish to conceal a single thing from you that concerns myself alone," replied Flora ; "it is only regarding some of Lionel's affairs, that I am bound to secrecy."

"Then, Flora, I will be inquisitive enough to ask you again—has Captain Dashwood made you a proposal?"

"Yes," said Flora, with downcast looks.

"On that day—in the library?"

"Yes."

"Though the meeting was merely to speak to you on Lionel's affairs?"

"Yes—indeed, I assure you," answered Flora, "that it was for that purpose alone I met him."

"I do not doubt your word, dear girl. But

listen : Captain Dashwood meets you to speak to you of Lionel's affairs ; he gives you a terrible picture of them, and alarms you ; he lets you know that Lionel is indebted to him ; and he concludes by offering you marriage. I *do* see an object now for Captain Dashwood's generosity to Lionel. You did not accept him ?”

“ No ; we were interrupted—”

“ *Tant mieux*, Flora, he must be paid.”

“ It is impossible ; Lionel has not money enough, and I dare not ask my father.”

“ No matter, child—he must be paid. What is the amount ?”

“ Lionel owed him five hundred pounds, and has paid him, he tells me, three hundred.”

“ Then there is but two hundred pounds due. Flora, you shall send it him to-night.”

“ Ah—but——”

“ Silence, mademoiselle. What ? will you not be my debtor ? You shall give me a regular legal bond if you like, and then I can lock you up, you know, if you don't pay.”

Flora burst into tears, and hid her face on her friend's neck.

"Silly child!" cried Mrs. St. Leger, kindly. "Ah, we will outwit this scheming captain, Flora, depend on it."

"You do not know *all*," said Flora, in broken accents.

"Then *tell* me all—at least, if you may do so."

"I cannot—I dare not. Lionel is in that man's power."

"Will he be so when the money is paid?" asked Mrs. St. Leger.

"Yes—oh, would to heaven I dare tell you the whole truth!"

"Poor child!" said Mrs. St. Leger, as Flora sobbed as though her heart would burst.

"There is *dishonour* in the case!" she murmured. "I cannot say another word."

"Dishonour!" exclaimed Mrs. St. Leger—"on Lionel's part?"

Flora moved her head in assent.

“And you believe it, Flora? You believe it on the assurance of that man?”

“Alas, alas!—I have seen the written proof,” she cried.

“It was a forgery!” exclaimed Mrs. St. Leger.

“Ha!” cried Flora, as she heard the fatal word, and she would have fallen, had not her friend supported her.

“Courage—courage, dear Flora. I tell you to disbelieve your own eyesight, rather than doubt your brother’s honour. Grant him reckless, extravagant, improvident—I do not believe that Lionel has been guilty of dishonour. I tell you there is foul play at work, and I warn you not to be the dupe of it.”

“I know not what to think—my brain is all confusion,” said Flora.

“Let it rest, then, my dear child—let it rest. Do not try to unravel the mystery all at once. Do not, in haste, confide to me more than you would deliberately desire. Let me leave you now.

You shall not be interrupted here. Another time we will discuss your brother's affairs, and, perhaps, we may admit him into our counsels. Meanwhile, at least, you must send him the money to pay his debt to Captain Dashwood. It shall be ready for you in a few hours."

And Mrs. St. Leger kissed the weeping girl, and left her alone in her chamber.

CHAPTER V.

THE two hundred pounds were despatched to Lionel Danvers the same evening—Mrs. St. Leger would take no refusal. In sending them Flora earnestly begged her brother to apply the sum to the purpose for which she sent it without delay, and to tell her whether he was indebted to Captain Dashwood in any other sum.

Having done this, she felt considerable relief of mind, especially as she had hopes of indirectly arranging the more serious debt which remained. Mrs. St. Leger's words had produced a strong effect on her mind. It is true they were uttered in ignorance of the real facts of the case, but they raised strange thoughts and doubts, which

she could as yet scarcely shape into form, but which boded some relief. At all events, Flora felt more calm and more cheerful than she had been since Dashwood's revelations, and every one observed the agreeable change.

"You said something very mysterious to me the other day," observed Flora to Mrs. St. Leger, as they sat side by side in a phaeton, and alone.

"What was it?" asked her friend.

"You told me that one of your guests would believe nothing against me, though all the world might denounce me to him. Were you serious?"

"Quite serious," was the laconic reply.

"Is it wrong to ask you to whom you refer?" said Flora, with some diffidence.

"At all events, it is very natural," replied Mrs. St. Leger, smiling, "so we won't discuss whether it is proper. But suppose you make a guess. Whom do you suspect?"

"Is it Mr. Mowbray?"

"No, it is not; and I don't wish it to be

Mr. Mowbray. I should make a bad mother, I fear, as far as seeking the 'eligibles' for my daughters is concerned. Mr. Mowbray, for example, is talented, rich, and good looking, yet I would not have him marry a daughter of mine if I could help it. I can't quite tell you why—it may be prejudice; but he seems to me to possess more intellect than feeling. I would rather see the latter turn the balance, in spite of my love for the former. It is *not* Mr. Mowbray."

Flora hesitated to pronounce another name, because she felt that she knew now the right one. Indeed, she could not have had much trouble in divining it, for no one suspected Tom Saville of being in love with any woman; Linton was too much occupied with quasi-literary discussions with Lady Fluke, and Jeffries was under the unceasing *surveillance* of the "pets." It was *not* Mowbray—it *must be* Frank Nugent.

"Are you sure you are not mistaken?" she asked, avoiding the name.

"Certainly not," replied Mrs. St. Leger. "I

might almost say that I have it from the gentleman's own lips, but, at least, he did not deny the fact when I taxed him with it. And so, Miss Flora, it is really true that you have enslaved the heart of my bookworm friend."

"Surely he is not a bookworm!" cried Flora, forgetting for the moment the "soft impeachment," in her anxiety to defend Frank's character from an accusation she did not like.

"No, he is not," said Mrs. St. Leger, smiling at the young lady's enthusiasm. "He is too fond of society, and has proved himself too open to other attractions to be what we commonly call a bookworm. He is a noble youth, Flora: there does not beat a truer or a braver heart in the world than Frank Nugent's."

"Have you known him long?" asked Flora.

"Yes, many years; but very intimately only a few months. His is a sad history. His mother was a beautiful woman, admired and loved by all who knew her, but she died when Frank was

not more than seventeen. To this day he worships her memory, and I believe he thinks of her more often than most of us think of the dearest earthly ties even a few months after their severance. His father was a London banker, of great wealth and still greater talent; but he had that fatal passion for speculation which is one of the curses of civilization. I won't give you a long history of the family, but tell you the catastrophe briefly. He utterly ruined himself by some gigantic speculations, and in the agony of remorse he destroyed himself. Frank was in one week, from a position of fancied wealth and independence, left penniless, and an orphan, under the most appalling circumstances."

"Horrible!" exclaimed Flora.

"Frank had then just left college," continued Mrs. St. Leger, "and was commencing studies for the bar, but he had no means of prosecuting them, for he literally was a beggar."

"But what did he do?" asked Flora, with her eyes full of tears.

“My dear child, he met adversity with the truest heroism. He actually lived on a mere crust—I can hardly tell you how he avoided starvation. He obtained lodgings in a very humble place, as a remuneration for instructing three children for a few hours a-day, and he tried to earn a little money by writing for cheap periodicals. He had very little success—not for want of talent, but for want of friends. He was really all but destitute.”

“Oh! is it not frightful to think of!” exclaimed Flora; “and then to remember the thousands my brother squanders!”

“Such comparisons always shock us,” said Mrs. St. Leger, “but they are apt to mislead our judgment also. But to proceed. I met Frank Nugent by chance.”

She then told Flora of all that the reader knows of Frank’s career subsequently down to the present moment.

“And he is very prosperous now, is he not?” asked Flora, greatly interested by the recital of Frank’s fortunes and misfortunes.

“No, I cannot say *that*,” replied Mrs. St. Leger ; “still I think that he has made a fair start: he has, at least, shown courage, perseverance, and talent, and if those three qualities will make their way in so ill-paid a profession as literature, he ought to succeed well. I have great hopes for him.”

“But *is* literature so ill paid?” asked Flora. “I have heard that disputed ; and I think one of our greatest living writers denies it emphatically.”

“You are right,” was the reply ; “but is he altogether a fair judge? Would you take a bishop’s opinion of the sufficiency of the clergy’s remuneration? Would you consider a Lord Chancellor an impartial judge in the case of the bar? Grant that such men have attained to their positions by their own high talents alone, and that they have earned splendid rewards most justly, still the question remains, are the hard-working members of the same professions, with less talent, but with sufficient to render them of

the greatest service to the world, well paid or ill paid? Do the working clergy receive a fair remuneration for their labours? Ask *them*, and hear their answer, and not that of the bench of bishops. Do the struggling juniors of the bar, who have read deeply and fought hard to master their profession well, do they earn a fair subsistence? And do the men who entertain us week by week, and month by month, in papers and periodicals, the men who produce educational works, the results of long and earnest labour, the writers of fiction, whose works circulate extensively throughout the libraries of the kingdom, though not *so* extensively as to make their names and the names of their authors ‘familiar in our mouths as household words,’ do these men—*can* these men—earn the subsistence of gentlemen with a fair chance of provision for sickness, old age, and the other ills that flesh is heir to? I fear *not*, Flora. Even the greatest novelist we have had, not judging selfishly because his own earnings have been in proportion to his own

high merits, but thinking of the cases of his less gifted and less fortunate brethren, proclaimed that ‘Literature was a good walking-stick, but a bad crutch.’ The age of Hogarth’s starving poet in the garret may have passed; but the age in which Leigh Hunt was left dependent on a pension, and Moore the same,—in which Hood died in poverty, and Laman Blanchard almost in want,—is surely not the one in which one or two brilliant exceptions can complacently affirm that literature is well paid.”

“Are not the general masses in all professions ill paid, then?” asked Flora; “for instance, the church and the bar; and I suppose medicine is no better.”

“I believe that all professions *are* ill paid, as far as the great body of those who follow them is concerned,” replied Mrs. St. Leger.

“Then literature is no worse than the rest, and literary men have no more cause for complaint than men of other professions, so it seems to me,” said Flora. “Am I right?”

“Not exactly, I think, and for this reason. It seems to me that literature should be better paid than any other profession, because it requires a higher class of intellect. Nearly any man, of the most ordinary abilities, can with proper study pass the examinations necessary to fit him for ordination into the church. The veriest boobies are ‘crammed,’ as it is called, sufficiently to send them through the Apothecaries’ Hall examinations. For admission to the bar, there is no examination at all. Thus, any man may become a member of either of those professions — divinity, physic, or law — if he chooses to undergo the prescribed ordeal. But is it so with literature? Can a man resolve to be a literary man, as he would undertake any other profession? Can he by any length of study, or any ordeal in the world, fit himself to be an author? Not unless a certain amount of talent belong to him; talent which, even in mediocre authors, is infinitely greater than in nine-tenths of the members of the other profes-

sions I have instanced. If the requisites, the mental requirements, of an author be greater and rarer than those of other men, surely his remuneration should be proportionately higher."

"In strict justice it seems so," replied Flora; "but how is it to be accomplished? If an author's works do not, by their sale, remunerate him, how are we to devise the means of recompensing him?"

"True; there are *no* means of doing so. But at least one thing may be done, and it is in the power of all to aid in it. If we cannot remunerate literature, we can, at least, *honour* it. Yet to this day, Flora, it is a matter of deliberation in some quarters whether an author is, as such, a gentleman; though if he have eaten dinners in the Temple, and be a barrister-at-law, the question is at rest directly. Let literature be honoured; let society pronounce it the highest of professions, or above *all* professions, and authors will have some consolation for their poverty, even if their poverty be not actually diminished through the

exaltation of their rank. At the present moment, an author who is known to be the favoured and honoured guest of the great and noble, is ten times more eagerly read than one of equal mental calibre, whose place in society is unknown. If you doubt my word, ask at your circulating library, and be assured of the fact."

"I do not doubt it," said Flora; "it is consistent with what Carlyle calls the 'Flunkeyism' of the age we live in."

"But, really," said Mrs. St. Leger, with a smile, "in our digression on literature, we have quite lost sight of our friend, Mr. Frank Nugent. What do you think of him, Flora?"

Flora looked a little confused at this question. It was rather hard to expect her to answer it directly, after the information she had just received of Frank's devotion to herself.

"Well, I won't call upon you for his eulogy," said Mrs. St. Leger, smiling; "but I shall

catechise you. Is he not very good-looking?"

"Yes."

"Very agreeable?"

"Very."

"Very well bred?"

"Perfectly so."

"Then, *par consequence*, I am perfectly satisfied with Miss Danvers' opinion of my young friend. Rosaline is satisfied with Byron."

Flora smiled again, as she hastened to say, "Were you not pleased with Mr. Nugent's reading of his part? I should not have given him credit for so much humour as he has."

"Because he is rather modest; a fault, perhaps, but not a bad one at three-and-twenty. Most of his literary efforts, however, have been of a humorous character. But here we are at our drive's end, and here comes the subject of our conversation, arm-in-arm with his friend, excellent Mr. Saville."

“I am glad to hear you praise *him*,” said Flora. “I like him so much.”

“I should distrust the sense and the heart too, that could not appreciate him,” Mrs. St. Leger rejoined. “He is sound to the very core, Flora.”

CHAPTER VI.

ONE of the most important events of the day, at a country house is the arrival of the post-bag. The party assembled at breakfast, the great brown leather sack containing the correspondence of half a dozen families is brought in ; the master of the house pulls out his key and opens it, and then one by one, like prizes out of the wheel of fortune, produces the letters, and hands them to their owners. Such was always the case at Townley Park, except when the post was unusually early, and the letters were distributed before the guests had left their rooms.

“ What have we to-day ?” said Mrs. St. Leger,

opening the letter bag one morning. "A letter for Lady Fluke, two for my lord, one for you, Colonel, one for Miss Danvers, a packet for you, Nugent, and only the Times newspaper for myself."

"Best of all," said Saville.

"You're not in love, Mr. Saville, or you would not say so," observed Mrs. St. Leger.

"I am *not*, Mrs. St. Leger. I never was but once."

"Bnt once; oh, a confession; a confession from Mr. Saville!" exclaimed, Miss Jenny Fluke.

"Well, if you please, I'll confess. I fell very desperately in love with our gamekeeper's daughter, who was very pretty and extremely well behaved."

"She returned it of course," said Miss Jenny.

"I'm afraid not," said Tom; "she married a very respectable young butcher."

"How disgusting!" exclaimed Miss Jenny; "pray, how old were you, Mr. Saville?"

"Fourteen," replied Tom.

“ Ah ! that’s absurd ; for you couldn’t be in love then.”

“ I could *fancy so* ; it’s the same thing.”

“ Saville,” cried Mr. St. Leger, who had been taking sly peeps at his “ Times,” in spite of the presence of company—curiosity is almost too powerful for good-breeding — “ Saville ; Dashwood has sold out.”

“ Really !” said Saville ; but not much concerned.

Mrs. St. Leger glanced towards Flora, who answered her look by saying—

“ So Lionel tells me in his letter. He says that it has taken the regiment by surprise.”

“ Has your brother heard from him ?” asked Mr. St. Leger, with a little curiosity that he could hardly account for.

“ No,” replied Flora ; “ not a word.”

“ When will Lionel join us ?” asked Mrs. St. Leger.

“ This day week he promises,” replied Flora.

The answer made Frank Nugent start. He

had almost forgotten that the brother of Flora Danvers was his antagonist in the duel ; that he had seriously wounded that brother, and, to appearance, attempted his life : that a knowledge of this must make Flora turn from him with disgust and detestation ; and now this event was so close at hand ! He trembled at the thought.

He had of late begun to cherish the idea that he was not displeasing to Flora. He had conversed with her constantly, and a degree of intimacy, and almost of mutual confidence, had sprung up between them, which was inexpressibly delightful to the young author. It seemed to him that Flora listened more willingly to his conversation than to others ; that she evinced a feeling which might be compassion for the isolated position he held in the world (for he had told her that he was almost without a relative), or it might be—and the thought transported him—the first germ of a sentiment still more tender. He knew not that Flora was acquainted with his history through Mrs. St. Leger, still less did he know

that she was aware of his devotion to herself. Certainly he needed no arts to attract her notice or awaken her sympathies. His love was of too deep and too passionate a nature for that. He worshipped her with heart and soul ; but he would not have turned aside from the straight course of manly truth and honour to gain one smile or one tender thought of hers. The love which he hoped to awaken must be based on truth ; she must love him for what he really was, and not from a delusion that he was one grain more gifted in heart and mind than after-experience would confirm. There was heroism in this love, at all events ; and though he was diffident enough to doubt whether one so pure and good, and talented as he judged her to be, could fix her affections on one so inferior as he believed himself to be ; yet he lived in a hope as earnest as his resolution was firm, to be loved for what he was—the creature that God, the world, and his own nature had made him—or not at all.

For a time he had believed, in spite of his

wishes to the contrary, that Flora loved Dashwood. He had since discarded the idea, and felt sure that it was incorrect. The next person whom he looked on as a rival was Gerard Mowbray. Nay, he felt sure that Mowbray was attached to Flora; but a little observation convinced him that the feeling was not reciprocal. Mrs. St. Leger was right in her estimation of Mowbray's character. The intellectuals predominated greatly over the sentiments. Few men were quicker of understanding, or duller of feeling, than Gerard Mowbray. Even in the case of Flora, though he was struck by her beauty, it was for its intellectual cast—its classical grace—not for the gentleness, the purity, the goodness, of its expression. He admired her, perhaps loved her, for her knowledge, and the rare mental powers he perceived in her, and not for the more generally endearing qualities which other men would have prized more highly. Perhaps Flora herself had read this peculiarity of Mowbray's character, and assuredly

she would not have admired it ; but, at least, it was apparent to so quick an observer as Frank Nugent that she did not love him.

The field then was open to him, so far as he could see, and day by day his hope grew stronger, that he was not regarded with indifference. Then came the most serious question of all — what right had he to run the risk of gaining a young girl's affections, when he was destitute of the means of supporting her as his wife ? It was a solemn question, and one that forced itself unceasingly upon him. It seemed to start up ever and anon to dash the bright visions that his rising hopes had conjured up, and to remind him that he was yet but little better than a poor adventurer, earning, precariously, his slender means of existence. And should *he* tempt from the sphere she belonged to, the wealthy, the high-born, the luxuriously-bred daughter of Fortune, to share the cares and the poverty of the struggling author ?

After all, Frank Nugent was *not* a hero, or he

would have answered this momentous question with a decided negative. Unhesitatingly, and at once, he would have detached himself from scenes surrounded by so much peril to his own high honour, and to the welfare of her he loved. But youth is apt to regard worldly position too lightly ; or Hope is too strong for sober judgment, and paints such visions in the future as make it forget the stern realities of the present. And so Frank Nugent went on loving Flora, and hoping that Flora would love him, and firmly resolving too, to use every power that God had given him to make himself worthy of her love, and enable him to offer her such a home as true love, without any great sacrifice, might well accept. We do not defend Frank—we state but the fact, and leave his conduct to the merciful consideration of the reader. If he were selfish—and there must have been some selfishness in all this—when was love free from that taint ? and had he not, at least, a spice of heroism to redeem the fault ?

Now came the event which was to crush all these hopes—the arrival of Flora's brother was at hand. How he cursed the memory of that fated duel ! It is true that he was not the challenger, neither had he been the provoker of it ; but could he expect sufficient candour from Lionel to avow this ? Again, he knew that nothing had been farther from his intention than to fire at Lionel Danvers at all—but yet he had hit him ; and it was most unlikely that he should be able to persuade either him or Flora that it was the result of accident, and not of a deliberate intention. Indeed, it was even improbable that he would ever have an opportunity of offering any explanation at all ; for he fully anticipated that the first recognition over, Lionel would proceed to denounce him to his sister, and Flora would either leave Townley Park at once, or, at least, avoid any further approach to intimacy with him.

He almost resolved to take the initiative, and depart himself. But there were several obsta-

cles. It would appear ungrateful to the St. Legers for their kind hospitality, when they would know that he had no engagements to call him away—and especially as the theatricals were yet to come off, and he had undertaken the principal character in the piece. Besides this, what good end would his departure answer? He would postpone the evil day—but not avert it. Sooner or later he must be brought face to face with Lionel in his sister's presence; and deeply as he was already attached to her, he felt that a time might arrive, when he should be still more enslaved by his love, and when the sudden and eternal destruction of the hopes he cherished might be fraught with still more bitter pain than now.

Mrs. St. Leger was greatly surprised at Lionel's assertion that he had heard nothing from Dashwood.

“Is not the conduct of this man most extraordinary, dear Flora?” she said, when they were alone, which was sure to occur nearly every day.

“Of Captain Dashwood you mean?” asked Flora.

“Yes. What can he mean by not writing to your brother? Flora I am more than ever convinced that there has been some foul play. I wish I knew more of this Captain Dashwood’s history.”

“Mr. Mowbray might enlighten you, perhaps,” said Flora.

“Gerard Mowbray! how? why?”

“He knows Captain Dashwood, as I told you,” replied Flora.

“Indeed, child, you never told me anything of the sort.”

“Oh, no—I had forgotten,” said Flora; “I was so engrossed in telling you of the circumstances of my interview in the library, that I forgot to tell you who it was that interrupted it. It was Mr. Mowbray—and I am almost convinced (though I was so confused at the time, that I may be mistaken) that he said he knew Captain Dashwood, but not by that name.

It was that strange expression that struck me so."

"Surely you *must* have been mistaken, dear Flora, or mysteries seem to multiply. Mr. Mowbray has never alluded to his acquaintance with Captain Dashwood."

"I have remarked that," said Flora. "And yet, I feel almost sure I heard him use the words I tell you—and remember, that Captain Dashwood went away within an hour of Mr. Mowbray's arrival."

"True—true," said Mrs. St. Leger, thoughtfully. "Well, I must see what information I can get from Mr. Mowbray. He may clear up our mystification; and certainly he will greatly increase it, if he refuses to tell me what he knows."

The same evening, at dinner, Mrs. St. Leger observed to Mowbray—

"You know Captain Dashwood, do you not, Mr. Mowbray?"

"We have met abroad," was the reply.

“A very elegant and accomplished man, don’t you think so, Mr. Mowbray?” asked Lady Emily Danvers.

“Very,” replied Mowbray.

“Capital shot,” said Lord Shuckburgh.

“First-rate billiard player,” said Sir Benjamin Fluke, who could not play at all.

“The best *écarté* player I have ever sat down with,” said Tom Saville.

Mowbray glanced sharply at the speaker, as if to enquire whether any double meaning lurked under his words ; but Tom’s face expressed nothing of the kind. Mrs. St. Leger saw the look, however, and determined to take the hint. In the evening she contrived to converse with Mowbray again.

“It is hardly a fair question to ask of any one,” she said, smiling — “but *does* Captain Dashwood play much—gamble, I mean?”

“I do not know,” replied Mowbray. “We have not met since we were both in Venice, some years ago.”

“Excepting here, on the day of your arrival?” said Mrs. St. Leger.

“Excepting here,” replied Mowbray, repeating her words.

“I had an object—no unworthy one I assure—in asking about Captain Dashwood,” said the lady.

“I do not doubt it, my dear Mrs. St. Leger ; but pardon me for not answering all you may wish to learn. This much I will tell you : I knew Captain Dashwood in Venice, but not by his present name.”

“Is not that strange ?” asked his listener, interrupting him.

“Not of itself,” he replied ; “many men have a travelling name, for various reasons. But to proceed. Captain Dashwood ought not to be a visitor under your roof. When I met him here, I knew that he or I must quit it at once. *He* determined to do so, as the price of my silence on a matter which I am therefore bound not

to reveal. It was, perhaps, rash of me to make the promise, but I did not want a 'scene' in your house, and, moreover, I might have been embarrassed for a time for want of proofs, had I denounced him to you and he had denied my imputations, or retaliated: so I thought it better to pass my word to him, and now I cannot break it."

"In the mean time we may be exposed at any time to a renewal of his intimacy," said the lady, with some chagrin.

"Which you can of course decline without explanation," suggested Mowbray; and he was happy enough to be called away at this moment to fulfil his promise of playing *écarté* with Lady Shuckburgh.

"More mysteries," said Mrs. St. Leger to herself, when he had gone: "but Gerard Mowbray is detestably selfish—I was not far wrong in my estimate of his character."

CHAPTER VII.

THE rehearsals of "Love's Labour's Lost" went on with spirit. Every one studied hard to learn his or her part, and accomplished the feat tolerably well. The great difficulty was, that each one seemed to take a different view of the play from the others. Lord Shuckburgh, for example, treated Don Adriano as a perfectly natural character. He saw nothing very peculiar in the Spaniard's dialogue or actions, and certainly considered the stage description of him, as a "fantastic" Spaniard, overdrawn. Making due allowances, his Lordship said, for the period of the play, and Don Adriano's imperfect knowledge of the language, he saw nothing to debar him

from the title of a perfect and highly-bred gentleman.

The Misses Fluke made the lady attendants on the Princess of France a little too like the pert chambermaids in a comedy of the old school, than the friends and companions of a royal lady. They could not properly distinguish wit from impertinence, and *badinage* from sauciness. Flora, on the other hand, was almost too refined for the free-tongued Rosaline, though Rosaline *is* a lady, and does not forget the fact so much as her prototype Beatrice.

The most perfect conception and execution of a character was Mrs. St. Leger's reading of the Princess ; her natural dignity of manner, and her liveliness and love of the humorous, blending together, were admirable.

Mowbray's acting was equally good, and Frank Nugent's not inferior. Indeed, the ease and playfulness with which the merry speeches of Biron tripped off his tongue proved how naturally joyful was his turn of mind, and how

much adversity, misfortune, poverty, gloomy prospects, love, and every other cloud-gathering ill, had contributed to damp his naturally buoyant spirits.

St. Leger made an admirable Boyet, and Tom Saville's Costard would have been irreproachable had he been able to look less like a gentleman than he did, in spite of effort and disguise of costume.

Carpenters and workmen of all sorts were busy at their labours, turning the large servants' hall into a temporary theatre. Scenery was constantly arriving in great vans ; costumes, and parts of costume, were being sent down each day by railway. Invitations were forwarded to all the neighbouring gentry to be present at the first grand representation ; and for a time the forthcoming theatricals occupied every one's attention as a most important affair, and even diminished the attractions of the partridges and the turnip fields.

Frank had lately given up shooting. He was

well quizzed for it for a time, but he bore all that pretty well. He preferred joining riding parties with the ladies, to plodding about all day with the sportsmen. Perhaps he felt like a schoolboy who knows that his holidays are fast drawing to a close, and determines to make the most of the remaining time, by enjoying his favourite pleasure while he may. Frank's favourite pleasure was riding by the side of Flora Danvers, and conversing with her.

It was strange how well each was becoming acquainted with the other's feelings and tastes. Frank seemed to have an intuitive knowledge of the kind of scenery Flora most admired, of the poetry she best loved, of the authors she had most studied, of the music that best pleased her—even of the individuals she would prefer among the guests, and the occasional visitors at Townley Park. It was not that she had ever told him these things—it was that the subtle influence of his passion was assimilating his nature to hers, though he knew it not. Perhaps, also,

there might be some change in Flora, too. Certainly she took daily greater interest in Frank's conversation; daily felt more anxious to know his opinions on every subject that crossed her mind; daily detected her thoughts dwelling more and more on the young author.

Something of the same kind had been the case during her intimacy with Dashwood; but yet how different were her feelings then! At that time her thoughts seemed to wander towards him in spite of herself—in spite of every effort she made to control them—as if drawn thither by some fatal, irresistible, but dreaded fascination. She trembled when she thought of Dashwood: she shrunk back from him when she detected in the tones of his voice some real or fancied tenderness; she averted her eyes when she knew that his gaze was fixed on her, not in simple modesty, but in dread lest she should encounter his glance, and read in it the passion she dreaded to have inspired. Not so with Frank. Voluntarily, and with a sensation of delight, she thought of him;

alone in her chamber she recalled the words of their conversation, the tones of his voice, the glance of intelligence and happiness that lighted up his face as he dilated on some theme that pleased them both, and felt that she understood and participated his enthusiasm. It may be that at times she read even more than this in the impassioned look of her companion—it may be that she saw in it the confirmation of what her friend had assured her, and felt that something more than intellectual delight made those eyes flash so brightly as they met hers ; and yet she shrunk not from the thought. If, indeed, her own image filled the youth's heart, at least she felt that it had a pure and noble abiding place : she saw no guile there, she feared no deception, she detected no foul taint of selfishness : all was transparent, spotless, manly, and generous.

How exquisite a thing is the enthusiasm of young love ! How beautiful the perfect confidence of one heart in another ! How purifying and how ennobling to man's nature ! Dull-

witted and cold of blood must they be who take love for a simple passion, or a mere fancy : who know not the god-like influence with which in all its purity it sways the heart : who recognize not in its attributes everything that is great and good, true and noble—nothing that is mean, base, false, or wicked. What are the highest virtues of humanity ? Faith, charity, self-sacrifice, truth. Which of them does not love teach ; nay, without which of them is love perfect ? Is not love the ever-enduring evidence of the Divinity that is within us ?

As the days passed by, Flora, who was not accustomed to let the time slip from her without some self-examination, became conscious of her increasing interest in Frank Nugent. His past history had deeply engaged her thoughts ; she pitied him for his misfortunes, and admired him for the patience and courage with which he had endured them. His presence alone afforded pleasure to her ; his absence created a void which she felt with pain. His conversation attracted her, and

seemed to afford a strong contrast to the prattle of most others who surrounded her. There was something more than common-place interest in this—was there not, Flora? Flora had the courage and the honesty to ask herself this question, and the response was, “yes.” And Flora knew and owned in her heart that she loved Frank Nugent.

And he—what felt he? Alas! poor Frank had long since settled the question with himself. He knew that he loved deeply and devotedly: and now that his love was founded on a true basis—on a knowledge of the character, the mind, the tastes of its object—he almost blushed for the mere fancied passion he had first felt. True, it was Flora—the same unchanged Flora—that he had loved then as now: but it was rather Flora Danvers, the beautiful and the graceful, than Flora, the intelligent, the high-souled, the gentle. Or rather it might be that he at first loved her for what he believed her to be, and now for what he knew, and had found her to be.

He had spoken no words of love yet—at least

he thought so : that is, he had certainly made no declaration of his attachment ; but he little suspected how often he had uttered sentences, and still more often had spoken in tones such as only love could have dictated or inspired.

Days of hourly intercourse beneath the same roof are equal to months—almost to years—of ordinary life of only occasional meetings. We all know how much longer we seem to have known a man with whom we have shared the same lodgings, or travelled in the same carriage for a few days, than many who have been on the list of our acquaintance for years. To have gone a three months' sea-voyage with any one is to have a very old friendship indeed, unless you have quarrelled half the time, which is not improbable, for the sea-air appears to have a wonderful tendency to promote pugnacity as well as love ; and a voyage to India used generally to terminate in a duel or two, having been possibly diversified by intrigues, jealousies, and offers of marriage numerous enough. Much more then must lovers be able to

study each other's characters, when living like parts of the same family, than when only occasionally brought together in a more formal style of society. Perhaps "studying characters" is a bad phrase applied to lovers—for they don't study, they drink in the knowledge unconsciously ; but let that pass. The fact which we wish to note is, that scarcely any trait in the character of either could have escaped two such keen and interested observers as Flora Danvers and Frank Nugent.

And not only so : but their own sentiments towards each other could not remain unknown. However carefully the young lady might endeavour to check any demonstration of her feeling to avoid any action that might indicate the state of her own heart, as in maidenly modesty she felt constrained to do, yet there are a thousand involuntarily impulses which are too strong for control, and which tell as clearly as the gossamer on the breeze the current of the heart's affections. Long after Frank's own feelings had ceased to be a matter of doubt to Flora, did Frank watch and

hope for some of these subtle evidences of that which he longed to detect. The shipwrecked wretch clinging to the spar which alone preserves him from the gulph of angry waters yawning for him, scarcely watches more intently for some speck of white canvas on the dusky ocean, the mother bending in agony over her dying child hardly knows more feverish anxiety as she listens to the last dull throbbings of the infant's heart, the fainting traveller in the desert scarcely strains his glance in more eager earnestness for some oasis where a drop of brackish water may moisten his parched lips, than this loving boy gazed on each changing expression of Flora's face, and silently, but with thrilling nerve and throbbing heart, longed for one look that should tell him of love inspired in Flora's heart.

At last he read it ; no matter when, or how, or where ; but he *knew it* as well as if the voice of an archangel had proclaimed it in his ear, and the wild delirium of his delight was in its very intensity only one degree removed from actual pain.

Then came calm ; the soft, delicious, entrancing calm that follows the consciousness of love reciprocated. The past was forgotten—the future undreamt of—the present was a dream of exquisite, engrossing delight. Doubt, fear, hope, all were gone—he was loved !

And then by Flora's side again he spoke less, he thought less ; a silent consciousness usurped the place of language in both ; and both felt and both knew that they loved and *were* loved.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE day fixed for the first representation of their comedy by the amateur company at Townley Park, was the day on which Lionel Danvers was expected to arrive. The *contretemps* was awful in the eyes of Frank Nugent. Should Lionel at once divulge the secret of the duel, Frank felt that it would be impossible for him to act with Flora Danvers ; or even if he could control himself sufficiently, he was sure that she would fail to do so. What was to be done ? Frank sought out that "sage counsellor and friend," Mr. Thomas Saville, and confided the fears he felt.

Tom Saville did not at first take Frank's view of the matter, simply because he was not per-

fectly aware of the relative position of Nugent and Miss Danvers. Supposing Flora was indignant at Frank having been the "horrid assassin" he suggested, what of that? She could not refuse to act with him, just because her pig-headed brother had forced him into a duel.

"You don't quite understand the case, I fear," said Frank, looking embarrassed.

"What case?" said Tom, with provoking coolness.

"I mean, that you don't make proper allowances for the position in which I stand with regard to Miss Danvers," replied Frank, using very incomprehensible language, as a man always does when he is modest, and wishes to treat a subject very delicately. Tom looked hard at him, with a peculiar smile of interrogation. Frank winced under it. This opened Tom Saville's eyes.

"Oh, that's it, is it?" he exclaimed; "the game is played and won, eh? I congratulate you, my dear Nugent, from my soul."

“Don’t mistake me,” said Frank, hastily; “I do *not* mean that I have made a declaration of love, and been accepted, as I can see you now believe.”

“I’ll swear by your looks you have not been rejected,” said Tom; “so I suppose I must conclude that though you have not exactly asked the question, you have gone far enough to know what the reply would be in such a case—in fact, that you perfectly understand one another, eh? Well, don’t answer me—I will take it for granted. It certainly alters the question entirely. What must be done with this inconvenient brother? In the good old times, one might have got a body of freebooters to waylay him, and keep him prisoner till he could do no mischief—but railway express trains have spoilt all that sport. If you had given notice to his creditors that he was running away from England, they might have arrested him—fellows *have* played that game before now, when they wanted a man out of the

way. Let me see—I wonder whether the fellow will listen to reason at all. Suppose I make a point of seeing him before he sees you, and try to talk him into good behaviour—I think I may manage it—will that do, Frank?”

“Thanks, thanks — yes,” replied Nugent; “anything that will make him quiet, if only for a day, and then we may perhaps explain the past.”

“I’ll do it, then,” answered Saville. “Let’s see, the train from the north arrives at four, I think—give me a Bradshaw; yes—very well, then. He’ll be here soon; meantime consider yourself a close prisoner in your room, sir, till I come to release you.”

So saying, he left the room.

Half an hour later, Lionel Danvers arrived at Townley Park. Tom Saville took care to place himself in his way, and was recognised by Lionel. After the first greetings were over, Lionel retired to his own room, to give a little attention to his travel-stained costume. Saville took the opportunity of sending a servant to ask if he could

have a few words with him alone, and was answered by an invitation to go to Lionel's room at once.

"Very mysterious, to want a private interview as soon as you're in the house, Danvers, isn't it?" he said, entering. "The truth is, I want to prevent a little 'scene' here, and that is why I have come to you. I suppose you are not aware that Mr. Nugent is on a visit here?"

"*What* Mr. Nugent?" asked Lionel, forgetting the name.

"Mr. Frank Nugent—your antagonist in the duel."

"*That* fellow here! is he a gentleman?" asked Lionel.

"You forget, perhaps, that I was his second," replied Saville, with an air of dignity.

"I beg your pardon," said Danvers, hastily, "I *did* forget it—I assure you, I did not mean to say anything offensive. But I was not aware that Mr. Nugent was much in society."

“Perhaps not—so much the worse for society. If birth, education, talent, and good breeding fit a man for the best society, certainly my friend Nugent would adorn *any* society.”

“I do not, of course, dispute your word,” said Lionel; “you know the man, and I do not. But may I ask what you tell me of his being here for?”

“Simply to prevent any hasty expression of feeling on your part on meeting him,” replied Saville. “I thought, for the sake of every one here—especially of the hostess and your sister—you would not wish for any unpleasant scene.”

“Certainly not,” said Lionel; “you are right. I have never mentioned the name of my antagonist to any one, and I don’t wish to do so now, especially as it would place some of us in a disagreeable dilemma. It’s devilish kind of you to warn me. I suppose we shall be formally introduced—I shall act the part of a stranger. If Mr. Nugent does the same, every thing will go right—will it not?”

“Certainly,” replied Tom, “and I’ll answer for Nugent. So I’ll leave you for the present. We shall meet at dinner.”

It was a wonderful relief to Frank Nugent’s mind to hear of the success of Tom Saville’s mission to Lionel. He was disposed to regard Tom as a wonderful negociator—a domestic Talleyrand or Metternich. Tom disclaimed any honour, by assuring him that Danvers assented to his proposal in an instant.

Frank felt now that he could act Biron *con amore*. His spirits were in a high state of buoyancy ; no interruption was to be dreaded to the smooth current of events, just at present. Rosaline, too, would not be the less joyous for her brother’s presence—and how beautiful she would look as the lively and witty Frenchwoman. But how long would it all last? Would Lionel be silent, when he found that his antagonist was the devoted admirer, almost the accepted suitor of his sister—and that suitor a penniless author? Would he not try every means in his power to

thwart the consummation of Frank's hopes? and what means so effectual as to denounce him as the man who had attempted his life?

This train of thought promised Frank a "fit of the dolefuls;" and as he by no means wished to dash present pleasure by anticipations of future pain, he strove hard to banish such thoughts altogether, and embrace for the present the "Carpe Diem" philosophy. He succeeded.

The dinner hour on this momentous day was fixed an hour earlier, so that the amateurs might have plenty of time to dress afterwards for the comedy, which was to commence at eight o'clock. The guests were nearly all assembled in the drawing room when Frank entered.

"Enter Biron," said Mrs. St. Leger. "Ah, Mr. Danvers," she continued, turning to Lionel, "I have not introduced you to Mr. Nugent yet." And she performed the ceremony, while each of the two gentlemen looked as grave and unconscious as if he had never beheld the other before.

“Mr. Nugent is the Biron of the evening,” observed Mrs. Leger.

“And an excellent actor he is,” observed Tom Saville, slyly. “It’s a talent I never suspected him of till lately.”

“Thank you for your compliments, good Costard,” said Frank.

The dinner passed off quietly enough ; Frank Nugent happy to be placed by the side of Flora Danvers, a seat for which he generally manœuvred successfully, perhaps with the connivance of Mrs. St. Leger. A few jokes were made about the forthcoming entertainment in the evening, and the several actors were conjured not to be nervous, by those who were only to form part of the audience.

No great deal of time was spent at table after the removal of the cloth, as the amateurs were anxious to get another peep at their books, to make more sure of the “hard bits” in their speeches, and also to be able to devote plenty of time to their costumes.

Half-past seven o'clock arrived, and so did a great number of visitors. Carriages from places near at hand, and carriages from a distance, were constantly driving up to the door: from one mile to fifteen, or even twenty miles distant, invited friends ventured across the country to witness the theatricals at Townley Park.

Tea was sipped, and the guests were welcomed, not by Mrs. St. Leger, of course, but by Lady Emily Danvers, who had agreed to take the hostess's part on the occasion; and then group after group were conducted to the theatre, where they found the most comfortable of seats, the most tastefully arranged proscenium, white satin "play bills," and a capital band, which played unceasingly.

Eight o'clock came. The prompter, a regular professional, especially retained from London for the purpose, had taken his seat. A grand overture was drawing to a conclusion, and expectation was on tiptoe. The overture ceased; the little silver bell rang, and the curtain drew up; punc-

tuality was, at all events, observed at the Townley Park theatre.

A very tolerably painted scene, with some trees, and a distant palace in it, was seen ; there was a moment's pause, and then, with stately tread, appeared Messrs. Gerard Mowbray, Frank Nugent, Jeffries, and Linton. The first of them was evidently as perfectly at ease as if he were entering a drawing-room under the most ordinary circumstances. The second looked a little nervous, but not remarkably so ; the third was evidently in a dreadful state of tremor, and did not seem to have his knees properly under his own control ; while the last looked as piggish and formal as if he were encased in the stiffest of buckram.

The scene passed off very well ; Mowbray and Nugent spoke well ; Linton, not badly, but with huge formality : but poor Jeffries was dreadfully flurried, and sometimes the prompter was more clearly heard than he.

Then came Tom Saville, as Costard, conducted

by Dull, who was acted by a gentleman, not a visitor staying at the house, but who performed his part excellently. Saville was admirable in make-up and dogged drollery—one of those odd mixtures of simplicity and shrewdness, impudence and humility, which are found only in Shakespeare's clowns.

Next followed Lord Shuckburgh, as the Spaniard, and a clever lad, who acted Moth. His lordship performed his part with a grave earnestness, as amusing as any burlesque could possibly have been. And so the first act was over, and rounds of applause had greeted all.

The second act opened with a pretty scene of tents spread out before the sight. And now came the ladies : Mrs. St. Leger, "every inch" a princess ; Flora, beautiful and graceful, but a little timid—the Misses Fluke, extremely well dressed, and quite at their ease ; there was also Mr. St. Leger, a perfect gentleman, admirably dressed, and a finished courtier in appearance. His manly voice and easy delivery made the first speech go

admirably ; the rich tones of his wife's voice followed, and then one by one all spoke ; but last of all, " Rosaline," as she describes the merry Biron, whose tongue is so fascinating—

*" That aged ears play truant at his tales,
And younger hearings are quite ravished,
So sweet and voluble is his discourse."*

There was a little nervousness at commencing, but it wore off at the third or fourth line, and the conclusion brought the fair speaker a murmur of applause, while a few stray questions of " Who is she ? " and a few exclamations of " How beautiful she is ! " bore testimony to the enthusiasm that Flora Danvers had excited.

It is a dull thing to read an account of the progress of a new play by the liveliest of critics; still duller then would our description be, if we followed an old one of Shakespeare's act for act, and scene for scene. Suffice it to say that it was capitally acted by the amateurs, who cast off all their nervousness as they proceeded, and

that the curtain fell amidst a burst of applause, which was genuinely felt by all who were present.

All the audience were invited to supper, and it was suggested that it would be folly for the actors to change their dresses ; so they walked into the large dining-room, where supper was displayed, just as they had appeared on the stage.

The conversation that passed was like the champagne—light and frothy ; pleasant enough at the time, though of little substance. We won't repeat a word of it, lest we should spoil the little good it contained. One fact, however, we may note ere we close this chapter. Lionel Danvers had watched Frank Nugent very earnestly, both on the stage and off it. The result of his scrutiny was expressed to himself as he retired to bed that night :—

“ That fellow is in love with Flora, I swear ; and, by Jove ! I believe she returns it. If so, I'll spoil *that* sport, or my name's not Lionel Danvers.”

CHAPTER IX.

“LIONEL, dear, come with me to my room ; I want to talk to you alone,” said Flora, after breakfast the next morning.

“Won’t another time do, Flora ?” asked her brother ; “I want to go and play at billiards with Saville.”

“Mr. Saville will excuse you for an hour,” said Flora. “If the day were fine enough for shooting, I should not think of asking you ; but billiards are not like partridges—they are always ready for you.”

“Very well, sister mine, I’ll come,” said Lionel ; and he followed her at once.

“I have so many things to ask you,” began

Flora, “and I shall have to catechise you, too, most severely; so sit down.”

“And *I* shall have to catechise *you* also,” replied Lionel, with a smile.

“How so?” she asked.

“Never mind, now. Go on,” he said; “I am listener for the present.”

“First of all, did you place the two hundred pounds I sent you to Captain Dashwood’s account?”

“I did; the very day I received it. And that reminds me, Flora, what a strange fellow Dashwood is, never to write to me!”

“Very,” replied Flora: “but I am so glad you have paid him what you owe him.”

“I am not sorry for it myself,” said Lionel: “but, Flora, excuse my impertinence—where did you get the money?”

“Never mind, sir,” she replied with indignation; “I borrowed it. Now listen—it was wrong of you not to tell me what else you owed Captain Dashwood.”

“ It’s easily told,” said Lionel. “ Nothing.”

“ *Nothing ?*” asked Flora.

“ Not a *sou*,” said Lionel.

“ Is there no other pecuniary dealing still between you ? Think, dear Lionel.”

“ There’s no need to think,” he replied ; “ there is *no* other transaction in money between us.”

Flora knew not what to think. Was Lionel so forgetful ?—no, that were impossible in such a case. It was clear that he did not *dare* to confess the truth to her. And yet how calm he seemed ! What fearful hypocrisy if he were uttering falsehoods ! Could he be so hardened in guilt already ?

“ I entreat you, dear Lionel, not to deceive me in this,” said Flora. “ Is there no acceptance, or whatever you call it, of *any other* person, which you have given to Captain Dashwood for money ?”

“ Are you amusing yourself at my expense, Flora, or what is it you mean ?” asked Lionel, angrily. “ I have had one or two short, but very

mysterious letters from you lately, that have puzzled me very much, and now you are cross-questioning me in the same style. Hang me ! if I know what you mean ?”

“ Do you *not* know, Lionel, or are you feigning ignorance only to deceive me ?” she asked passionately.

“ Upon my soul, Flora, this is too bad,” said Lionel. “ I never have told you a lie yet, when you have made a direct appeal to my truth, and you have no right now to pretend to doubt my word. I have told you—I will *swear* to you, if you cannot trust your brother’s simple word—that there are no dealings between Dashwood and myself connected with money, and, excepting the one case you know of, there never have been any.”

Flora sat still like one half stunned, for a moment. Then looking at Lionel, and reading truth in his glances, she sprang up and threw her arms about his neck.

“ Forgive me, dear brother, forgive me ; but

there has been horrible treachery at work, and your sister has been the dupe of it."

"What treachery? What is it? Be calm, my dear little sister. Tell me what it is," said her brother.

"I had sworn not to reveal it," replied Flora; "but surely the oath is not binding now; for I swore not to reveal what I thought was truth, and not a fearful, fiendish invention. I *will* tell you, Lionel; but, for Heaven's sake, be calm, while you hear it, and pardon your sister for ever having been deceived by it."

"Go on," said Lionel. "I will be as calm as I can, and I will promise not to upbraid you, Flora."

Flora Danvers then detailed the many conversations she had held with Dashwood on the subject of Lionel's debts and difficulties — till she came to the fatal one in which the forged acceptance had been shewn her. Lionel gasped for breath as he heard this, and was white as death; but Flora saw well that it was with rage and indignation, and *not* with guilt. Then she hurried on

to the scene in the library, and to Dashwood's proposal, that she should marry him, as the price of Lionel's release.

" You did not consent, Flora—say that you did not consent—even under those infamous threats."

" I *did not*."

" Right—right—my own brave little sister. If your brother had been the scoundrel you believed him to be, you had better have cast him off to the gallows itself, than have offered to sell yourself to redeem him. By Heaven ! if *you* did wrong, I would *rather* see you punished to the end of time, than move a hand to save you. Why should any one make an iota of sacrifice to save or to screen the very nearest of kindred from the just punishment of infamy?"

" It was not that feeling that guided me, Lionel ; nor should it guide any of God's erring creatures. It was that I still hoped to save you at a less fearful sacrifice, than by this revolting sale of myself."

" You women are too merciful," said Lionel.

“ Even now, you would, no doubt, dissuade me, if you could, from punishing this dastardly villain. Flora, I will not rest for a day till I have his heart’s blood.”

“ For God’s sake ! Lionel, do not speak so ; your very looks frighten me. Be reasonable. This man has alarmed me, and caused me much uneasiness ; but, after all, no positive harm has been done”

“ No thanks to *him* for that,” said Lionel. “ But I am resolved : so if you would not increase my rage, speak no more about the man.”

“ One question then, dear Lionel. Do you owe twenty-five thousand pounds ?”

“ What !” exclaimed Lionel. “ I scarcely owe as many hundreds.”

“ Thank Heaven !” ejaculated Flora : and now that this horrible revelation was over, she wept freely.

“ Come, Flora dear, cheer up,” said her brother : “ besides, I have now to catechise *you*.”

“What is it?” asked Flora, feeling a little misgiving.

“Flora, are you in love?” said Lionel abruptly.

“What a strange question!” answered Flora, blushing in confusion.

“Can you not give it a plain answer? or I will do it for you, Flora. You *are* in love, and it is with that snob, Nugent.”

Flora’s eyes flashed with indignation.

“Whether your accusation be true or not,” she said, “you have no right to speak abusively of a gentleman whom you meet beneath this roof; and still less does it become my brother to apply such epithets to the man whom he believes, truly or falsely, to be loved by his sister.”

“But is he *not* one?” asked Lionel.”

“He is *not*,” answered Flora.

“You are warm in his advocacy,” said Lionel.

“I should blush to be otherwise, in the advocacy of any one whom you so unjustly assail with your coarseness,” she replied.

“Bravo!” said her brother; “but what is this Mr. Nugent? is he not an author?”

“He is.”

“Do you call that being a gentleman?”

“Shame on you, Lionel!” she cried. “Can there be anything more ennobling than the pursuit of literature? Is it not, at least, as lofty a calling as that of drilling men into machines, to butcher and be butchered?”

“Thank you, Flora. Why, the last sentence would do for a radical peace-congress orator. Well then, since you *do* love this Mr. Nugent—”

“I did not say so,” interrupted Flora. “And pardon me, Lionel, if I deny your right thus to question and annoy me. Had any declaration of attachment passed between myself and Mr. Nugent, or any other man, you ought to know that I am not so lost to delicacy as to conceal such a fact from my parents. So long as I am silent, no one has a right to speak to me as you are doing.”

“That sounds well, Flora; but there is such

a thing as mutual love, without any *declaration*, as you call it. I did not accuse you of being 'engaged' to Mr. Nugent, but of being attached to him; and I asked you whether I was right?"

"And I answer, that you are not justified in asking such a question. Surely, Lionel, you must little understand our natures, if you suppose that any girl would admit her affection for an undeclared lover."

"Then I may draw my own conclusions?" said Lionel.

"You may happen to draw most unjust ones," she replied. "I would not answer you 'yes,' or 'no,' whichever might be the truth, because my answer would admit your right to question me."

"You fence well," said Lionel, feeling very angry. "You have my full permission to love and to wed this pen and ink man, if you will; but it may be as well for you to know that it was by his hand your brother nearly met his death."

“By his!” cried Flora. “When?”

“In the duel,” he replied: “if you doubt my word, as you seem so well disposed to do to-day, *ask him.*”

If Lionel needed any proof that Flora loved his former adversary, he had it now, for she was pale as death, and half fainting. He hastened to support her, and tried to comfort her, for he was touched by the effect that his words had produced, though only for a moment. Delight at the success he had achieved overcame all other feelings, and, as soon as Flora was sufficiently revived to be fit to be left alone, he determined to quit the room, and leave his words to fulfil their object.

“Stay, Lionel, one word more,” she cried to him, as he was going; “what was the cause, the origin of the duel?”

“You had better not ask,” he replied. “It was about a girl of his.” And he left the room, unconscious, perhaps, of the complete epitome of his own character he had just displayed—first

indignantly protesting against the dishonour imputed to him, and a few minutes later availing himself of a base and unworthy insinuation against the character of another, to gain his own ends.

CHAPTER X.

THE day after the dramatic representation at Townley Park was an eventful one to several of the little community there assembled. First, there was the interview between Lionel and his sister, wherein the latter had found so much to rejoice at, and so much to disturb her peace of mind. It would be difficult to determine whether the relief she experienced in finding her brother innocent of the foul crime he was suspected of, or the terrible blow to her own affections in learning that Frank Nugent had been the adversary of her brother in a duel fought for some unworthy woman, turned the balance in her heart. Perhaps the latter; for in the former

case she had *hoped*, and her hopes had been much strengthened by Mrs. St. Leger's words to her ; but in regard to Frank, there was no room for hope. He was not only the man who had nearly destroyed her brother's life, but the origin of their quarrel was one of her own sex. Was she one to whom Frank's heart was given, or was she something worse ? Flora speculated on this question, for her brother's words might bear either interpretation. But, in either case, how contemptible must be the conduct of Frank Nugent ! And this was the man she had looked upon as the incarnation of honour, truth, and purity of soul ! This was the man she had loved ! Poor Flora ! it was a sad blight to the freshness of her young love.

In the afternoon of the same day, a telegraphic despatch reached Townley Hall for Tom Saville, begging him to hasten with all speed to the north, where his elder brother lay dangerously ill. Bidding a hasty farewell to his entertainers

and to Frank Nugent, Tom started by the first train.

Some time previously Nugent would have felt his friend's absence very much, for he was accustomed to look upon him almost as a brother, and to spend much of his leisure time with him. But now Frank was too much engrossed by his love, to be much influenced by any circumstances not affecting the object of it. So long as Flora was near him, and he could talk to her, and confide in her, and hear the sweet tones that held his heart in thrall, he cared for little else. Truly, love is the most selfish of passions; though it is double selfishness, as it includes its object in it.

Decidedly Lionel was an obstacle in Frank's way. It was clear that he kept his promise about the duel on the day of his arrival; but how long could he depend on his secrecy? Frank heartily wished that a telegraphic dispatch might summon Mr. Lionel Danvers to some place or other. His wish was not long ungratified—not that the

telegraph called Lionel away, but he went without it.

“Is Lionel here?” cried Flora, entering the library quickly, where Mrs. St. Leger, Lady Emily Danvers, and Frank Nugent were seated.

“No,” replied Lady Emily.

“Then he has gone!” exclaimed Flora.

“Gone! where?” asked her mother.

“I found this little note thrust under the door of my room,” replied Flora; “it is from Lionel. ‘Dear Flora—I am off to town in great haste.—Make every apology for me.—You shall hear from me shortly.—L. D.’ I hastened down here directly, to see whether he had really gone.”

“Let me make enquiry,” said Mrs. St. Leger, ringing the bell. “Has Mr. Lionel Danvers left the house, do you know?” she asked the servant who entered.

“Yes, ma’am. Mr. Danvers ordered a post-chaise from the Townley Arms nearly an hour ago. He said he would walk to the inn. Thomas carried his portmanteau, and he says that Mr.

Danvers ordered the postilion to drive to the Station."

"Very well—that will do."

"I never heard of such dreadful ill-breeding in my life," said Lady Emily. "Lionel gets worse and worse. What can he have to take him to town, Flora?"

"He has only told me what I read you, mamma," answered Flora, avoiding the question.

"I am sure Colonel Danvers will be greatly vexed," said Lady Emily. "Is it not distressing, my dear Mrs. St. Leger, to see how the army spoils a young man's breeding? They fall into the most hateful habits, and fancy that they are models of perfection."

"Lionel may really have been obliged to go," said Mrs. St. Leger, "and I cannot agree with you, dear Lady Emily, in your sweeping condemnation of the army."

"There are exceptions, of course," said Lady Emily; "Captain Dashwood, for example."

A dark shade passed over Flora's countenance

as she heard that name. Frank saw it, and so did Mrs. St. Leger, and both were well pleased.

"I shall go in search of the Colonel," said Lady Emily, closing her book and rising, and she swept out of the room.

"Are you alarmed, dear Flora?" asked Mrs. St. Leger.

"Yes," said Flora, in a low voice, and she looked so.

"Please, ma'am," said a servant entering the room, and addressing Mrs. St. Leger, "the housekeeper wishes to know if she may speak to you."

"Yes, I will come to her at once. Wait here, Flora dear, will you? I will not be away long."

Flora and Frank were left alone. Poor Flora's heart beat fast, and she was conscious that the colour had left her cheeks. Frank, ignorant of what had passed, was only happy.

"I fear you are in anxiety about your brother, Miss Danvers," he said.

Flora bowed; she thought she said "Yes,"

but she was mistaken; her voice refused to utter it.

“Is there any way in which I can assist you?” asked Frank; “shall I hasten to the Station with any message? I may reach there before the train has started.”

“Thank you—no,” said Flora; and Frank quite started at the tones, they seemed so unlike her own. He looked anxiously in her face; it must be that she is frightened about her brother, he thought—how pale she looks!

“You are not well,” he said anxiously, and with real tenderness. “May I fetch you something?”

“Do not trouble yourself,” she said. “I am not ill.”

There was something in her appearance now that made Frank suspect that she was moved by more than only anxiety about her brother. He looked earnestly at her; but Flora turned over the leaves of a periodical on the table, trying to seem unconscious of his gaze.

“Miss Danvers — have I offended you?” asked Frank, with such sudden and painful earnestness, that Flora could not help glancing at him.

“Offended me? no,” she replied coldly; “how could that be possible?”

“I do not know, indeed,” answered Frank, with still more earnestness. “God knows, I would rather cut my tongue out than utter a word that could give you pain, but your manner is so different. I mean,” and he hesitated a little, “you speak to me so coldly, that I believe, in spite of my own conscience, that I *must* have given you offence.”

“You are mistaken,” said Flora, in the same tone.

Frank was wounded to the quick; his heart felt as if it would burst.

“Then in pity,” he cried, “do not speak to me so coldly.”

“Sir!” said Flora, rising, “you are forgetting yourself.”

“No, no. Would to heaven I *could* forget the past, or forget this moment !” he exclaimed. “Flora—Miss Danvers—hear me but for one minute. If I tell you that I love you, that I worship you, that for weeks you have been the sole object of every thought, every wish, every hope I have known—I tell you no more than your own heart has long since taught you. Flora, you *know* that I love you.”

Flora sat pale and motionless ; she felt that she ought to listen no further, but she had not strength or courage to move.

“Yes, you *know* it,” he continued ; “but if I say that in your looks I fancied I had read a something which bade me hope—something which led me to feel that you were not utterly insensible to my devotion—to think that the religious homage of a heart which had never bowed to any other idol, was not quite ungrateful to you—Flora, you may denounce me as vain and presumptuous, but I swear to you I *did* believe that you would not spurn the affection of the poor author. Pardon the

error, it was not vanity, but too much hope that engendered it; but do not now crush me with more than indifference. You are too noble and too generous to inflict pain on any one; spare me then, in this our parting interview, the cold looks, and colder tones, the very memory of which hereafter will be agony to my spirit. Few men at my years have known more sorrow and adversity, few have been less cheered by the voice of affection or the hand of friendship. He who has been surrounded by loved relatives, who has felt all his life a mother's or a sister's fondness, may *love* indeed; but I do not believe that he can know the exquisite thrill of delight which vibrates through the heart of such an one as I am, when first he feels that he has inspired the faintest breath of love in the bosom of *another*,—of one so beautiful, so high-souled, so perfect as yourself; it is a new world to him, a sudden step from the gloom of selfish solitude into glorious sunlight. Such has been the entrancing vision I have gazed on, Flora; such the exquisite dream I have lived in. The vision

has faded, and the dream is past. God help me !
I am awake now !”

His voice was low and broken, and so mournful as the last few words were uttered, that Flora was deeply moved, in spite of herself.

“ Can this be all mere acting ?” she asked her own heart. “ Oh, why has Nature given to Hypocrisy the accents of divine truth !”

“ I have heard enough,” she said, in gentler tones than before, for she *could not* act perfect indifference. “ You cannot expect many words of reply from me. I can pity even those whom I cannot respect ; if all, nay, if any part of what you say be true, do not suppose that I feel no compassion for your sufferings.”

“ And is it kind, is it generous, is it simple justice even,” asked Frank, almost with bitterness, “ thus to doubt, or to feign doubt of my truthfulness ?”

“ It is neither wise nor just to *me*, Mr. Nugent, to prolong this interview,” said Flora, moving towards the door,

“Stay!” cried Frank; “*I* will go, Miss Danvers. Farewell! tell me at least that we do not part in anger,” and he held out his hand to her.

“Not in anger,” said Flora; but she did not take his proffered hand.

“Will you not then give me for the last time the grasp of friendship?” he asked.

Flora advanced her hand, and half withdrew it. Frank looked earnestly at her; her eyes were fixed upon his face, but they fell as they encountered his, and she murmured, as a slight shudder passed over her frame—

“Is there not *blood* upon that hand?”

“Ha!” cried Frank, starting back. “It is then that —”

“Do you deny it?” she cried, in momentary hope.

“No; but —”

“Enough, enough,” said Flora, as she turned to the table, and rested her hand upon her forehead: and Frank, with one lingering look,

earnest as the last gaze we cast upon the form that death has smitten, and the grave shall soon hide,—uttered not another word, but he left the room with a broken spirit, and a bursting heart.

CHAPTER XI.

“WHY, it’s Mr. New-gent, I *do* declare,” exclaimed Mrs. Marsden, as Frank’s voice was heard in the hall, telling the cabman to bring in his portmanteau.

“So it is,” said David Tonks, who was seated in the little front parlour with Mrs. Marsden and Fanny; and David ran out of the room to welcome his friend.

“Come in, Mr. New-gent,” said Mrs. Marsden; “*rarely* now I *am* glad to see you; but who’d have thought you’d have come upon us all promiscuous like!”

“I hope I shan’t inconvenience you by coming

so unexpectedly," said Frank. "How do you do, Miss Fanny? But I needn't ask—blooming as ever, I see;" and Frank shook hands with Fanny, and Fanny blushed.

"I'm only afraid about the bed," said Mrs. Marsden. "I've had it *laired* and *laired* over and over again; but it's a week since it was slept in now—leastways it's a week since Fanny had it under her's—aint it, Fanny?"

Fanny said it should be aired quite properly; but perhaps Mr. Nugent would take a seat—he must be tired.

"Lor bless me! where's my manners," said Mrs. Marsden, "not to ask you?—take this chair, Mr. N."

"I hope your husband is quite well," said Frank.

"Oh, yes; he's pretty well, thank you—but *rarely*, Mr. New-gent, I thought you was going to be married."

"La, mamma!" said Fanny.

"Well, I *did* though," continued Mrs. Marsden: "so that's all about it. When I heard

about that beautiful young lady that's the sister of the gentleman that was elervated and forgot hisself with you Fanny—says I to Marsden, 'Mr. New-gent will go and marry that lady, M. — take *my* word for it.' ”

Poor Frank looked very confused at this speech, and David felt rather uncomfortable, as it seemed as if he had been divulging Frank's secrets.

“ I don't think I ever said any thing which could lead any one to suppose so, Mrs. Marsden,” said Frank, with a glance towards David.

“ Oh no, in course *not*,” said Mrs. Marsden : “ it was my own idea you know—all out of my own head.”

“ You don't look well,” observed David.

“ I don't feel very well to-day,” replied Frank. “ If you'll excuse me, Mrs. Marsden, I'll go up stairs to my own room. Will you come with me ?” he said turning to David.

“ Certainly—with pleasure,” answered David, and they went to Frank's little sitting-room together.

“ I'm glad to see you back,” said David, when

they were alone, “and yet I’m sorry. You look ill and care-worn—have you been unwell?”

“No,” replied Frank.

“Your last letter was so cheerful,” said David, “that I expected to see you in strong health and spirits.”

“I believe I was so, last night,” answered Frank: “but I’m out of sorts to-day, my dear friend.”

“A little worse than that, I fear,” said David.

“How so? what do you mean?” cried Frank.

“David Tonks knows the heartache too well not to detect it in another,” replied David: “but forgive me for paining you,” he added, as he saw Frank’s gloomy look.

“*You* have not pained me,” said Frank, in a gentle tone: “another time I will tell you who, or what, *has*. God knows I have not many who would care to hear of my joys or my sorrows. I am only too glad to confide in one who does. Now tell me about yourself,” he continued.

“There’s not much to tell,” replied David.

“I have jogged on as you left me.”

“What ! no changes ?” said Frank. “Has Miss Fanny not smiled yet ?”

“She is very good,” replied David, rather confused.

“I see you won’t confide in *me*,” said Frank, half smiling.

“Yes, I will, indeed,” returned David, hastily. “I have no reason to complain of Miss Fanny ; she is very kind and considerate to me in everything. I don’t think she dislikes me so much as she used.”

“Dislikes you ! why, man, she never disliked you, I’ll vow,” exclaimed Frank.

“No, no, perhaps not,” said David ; “but I think she preferred my absence to my presence.”

“And now it’s the reverse ?” asked Frank.

“I sometimes hope so,” said David, modestly.

“Hope so ! you believe so, you mean. Why, David, you are a pretty fellow to talk of confiding in me ; you are keeping all the cream of your thoughts to yourself, and giving me the skim-milk. The truth is, I suppose, that Fanny

Marsden is desperately in love with you, and has consented to be Mrs. David Tonks."

"No, indeed, I assure you it's not so," said David.

"Well, well, it's all on the right road I see," said Frank. "What does the papa think?"

"That's the strangest part of it," said David. "I don't know what to think of the man. It seems to me as if he were trying all in his power to make me his son-in-law. He's always coming down to me at my office, and taking me out to lunch; and he does nothing but talk about his daughter—how pretty she is, and how clever, and what an excellent wife she would make, and what a lucky man her husband will be—which is all true, you know; but it seems strange to hear a father constantly saying it of his daughter in that way. Sometimes I'm convinced he comes to me only to talk to me about Fanny; and he never used at first, you know. And then it isn't as if he was such a fond affectionate father that he couldn't help talking of his daughter,

because I don't believe he's anything of the kind. And then I often hear Mrs. Marsden say strange things to her daughter—such as 'What would your father say to you to forget Mr. Tonks like that?' and those sorts of things. You know the good woman's style: but it's quite clear to me that he has told her to make Fanny attentive to me."

"And what effect has it on Fanny?" asked Frank.

"A very bad one," replied David; "at least, as far as I'm concerned. Just when Fanny was beginning of her own accord to be a little less indifferent to me, her father and mother began this strange conduct, and, of course, it makes Fanny draw back a little, because it's natural she should be afraid that I should impute any little kindness of hers to their promptings. But I *don't* do so, I assure you; for Fanny is the most honest-hearted girl in the world, and I'm sure she'd sooner die than play such a game for any reward in the world."

“It’s strange,” said Frank, “if you’re sure you’re not mistaken.”

“I’m quite certain,” replied David, very positively. “If I were a rich man, I could easily understand Mr. Marsden’s views; but, poor devil as I am, it puzzles me to guess what his object can be.”

“Does he know exactly how you *are* situated?” asked Frank.

“He knows my income to a halfpenny,” was the reply. “I told him, you know, because I didn’t wish him to be deceiving himself about it.”

“After all, though, you are well enough off to marry his daughter,” observed Frank.

David did not reply to this—perhaps because he thought that Fanny deserved to marry a prince. But he continued:—

“He has a habit, too, of often asking me, in a joking way, what I would do if he were to help me to a fortune? what I’d settle on my wife, too? and all that sort of thing. Of course,

it may be only for amusement he says it, but still he's *constantly* saying it; and he appears to me such a scheming fellow, that sometimes I find myself suspecting, in spite of my common sense, that he has some real meaning."

"This is worth thinking of," said Frank: "stay, let me see."

Both were silent for a few minutes, trying to conceive what could be the object of Mr. Marsden's manœuvrings and insinuations. Neither was able to sound them.

"I don't see any rational explanation," said Frank, "of the man's conduct, unless he wants to make use of you in some money-getting plot that his brain is hatching. At all events, I would strongly advise you to have nothing to do with him in any way connected with business or money."

"Indeed I won't," said David.

"Neither now nor *after* marriage, mind," said Frank, smiling. "Upon my word, David, it's a drawback, even on such a good little wife as

Fanny would make, to have such a father-in-law."

"I shouldn't marry *him*," said David, with a laugh.

"I don't know," replied Frank; "I'm very much disposed to think that a man marries all his wife's relatives with her, at least they seem to think so."

"When he's rich, I suppose," observed David.

"Oh, yes, decidedly, when he's rich I mean. When he's poor, you know, they entirely disapprove of the match, and all that sort of thing; and they discountenance him on principle, the principle being to prevent the slightest chance of an attack on their pockets."

"Well, I've *no* relatives!" parenthesised David.

"Thank God for it!" said Frank; "a poor man seldom loves, or is loved by them. Better seek aid from the workhouse than from a rich relative; you are surer to get it, and it's far less humiliating."

"You are fatigued, I see," said David, "so

I'll wish you good night. I hope you will rest well—good bye.”

“He’s an honest, excellent fellow,” thought Frank, as his poor friend left the room, “and I am heartily glad that his wooing seems to prosper at last. What a contrast to my own !” He threw himself into his easy chair, and hid his eyes in his hand, as if by shutting out external things he might commune more freely with his inward thoughts.

It is strange to observe how ill men often bear the blow when it actually falls, which they have, nevertheless, long anticipated, and nerved themselves to meet. The watcher by the sick bed of one dear to him, has known for many a long day that the case is past hope, that death is but dallying with its victim, and cannot by any earthly power be averted ; and yet, when the fatal moment comes, the torrent of grief is as passionate and uncontrolled, as deep and as enduring, as though a sudden and unforeseen event had snatched away the dear one in the midst of

health and hope. The spendthrift who has wasted his substance in a round of wild extravagance, who has seen the stock of his wealth day by day diminish, and who knows that a few short weeks will inevitably behold him a penniless beggar, yet quails with the horror of despair when the last remnant of his store is gone, and feels a regret as vivid as one who by some sudden mischance, over which he had no control, and in which he had no agency, is plunged from affluence into the depths of poverty. What is the secret of this strange perversity? It is Hope.

We do not *believe* in death till death's shaft has struck down his victim. We *cannot* believe in it if we would; let the leech declare that all is over, let the failing memory, the glazing eye, the hushed voice, tell their tale in characters plain as the written words on the page before us; we yet cannot realize the *certainly* of death. We still hope, faintly and unconsciously it may be, but we *do* hope to the last moment. The

hand is cold, the dull eye is closed, the heart has ceased to beat ere the death we were told of becomes to us *the fact* ; and then, and not till then, bursts forth in all its force the torrent of our pent-up agony of grief. We do not even believe in ruin. We cannot realize to ourselves the idea of penury and want, while we still float on the sea of plenty ; the golden heap has diminished, it has sunk to a few pieces, a day or two and all will be gone ; we know it, we see it, yet there is a nothingness, a blank, in utter beggary that we cannot believe in. Hope, some faint, wild, visionary, impalpable ray of hope, that we cannot fix or fashion into shape, still lingers about the heart, and forbids us to know what ruin is, till want and penury in all their hideousness have laid their cold grasp upon us, and then come regret, remorse, and shame, undying and immedicable.

So was it with Frank Nugent now. He had long expected that the revelation of his duel with Lionel Danvers would come, and come soon. He

had long known that it must come ; he had not questioned, even to himself, the effect that such an announcement would produce on the mind of Flora. He felt sure that she would shrink from him, discard him, hate him ; and yet the instinctive feeling of hope, that no apparent certainty can crush in any human breast, had buoyed him up ; he thought, he felt sure, that his doom was fixed : and still, in the midst of his fancied certainty of hopelessness, hope itself existed. It was not that he could devise any means of preventing the revelation, it was not that he could see any chance of an explanation being afforded him, or of its being needed if given, or still less of its being deemed sufficient ; no,—it was nothing but this vague hopefulness that had supported him, and made him at times forget the precipice to which he was daily drawing nearer. The fatal moment had come at last, and he was as unprepared to endure its bitterness, as though he had never anticipated it.

In truth, it seemed a cruel fate, the more he

reflected on it. He knew that he was as guiltless, in heart, of Lionel's blood as of any crime on earth : he knew that he had been forced into the duel by the obstinacy and pugnacity of his opponent : he knew that his adversary was grossly in error, and that he had done no more in protecting Fanny Marsden from insult than manhood and humanity demanded of any one. And yet he was condemned : yet for this unwilful fault he was to be driven from the sight and from the heart of her he loved. His affections were to be sacrificed, his hopes crushed, his prospects blighted, his ambition annihilated for no crime, for no intention to commit crime, but for a horrible fatality over which he had no control.

No power of reparation remained to him, even if his accident were to be written as his misdeed. No exertion in the future could redeem or wipe out the past. He was not in the position of the very felon, who can regain what his crimes have lost him, by years of toil, patience, honesty, and endurance. His punishment had no end in this

life—and it was the deepest punishment that human intellect could have devised—eternal banishment from the loved one, eternal scorn and hatred, where he would have sacrificed life itself to have inspired love alone. The doom of the first murderer seemed, to his gloomy thoughts, less severe than his own—for he was henceforth a wanderer and an outcast, not from the wide world, but from the only spot in which he cared to live—the heart of Flora Danvers.

CHAPTER XII.

MR. MARSDEN had been “out of luck,” as he expressed it, lately. One or two favourite horses had won important races, and he had been “hit hard.” Not that he had exactly lost money out of pocket—gentlemen of Mr. Marsden’s profession seldom do that; but he was accustomed to reckon his losses not by what he had actually parted with, but by what he might have gained. Thus the “great St. Leger” had turned out a poor speculation for Mr. Marsden. He had reckoned on pocketing about £800 on that race, and he had only cleared an odd £50. The event was so great a shock to him; that he had seriously contemplated retiring from business—that is to

say, shutting up his shop, and leaving the respectable people who held his little promissory tickets to get their money as they could. Mr. Marsden had innumerable precedents for such a course ; and if precedents guide Westminster Hall in preference to justice, why should not Mr. Marsden steer his course by the same compass ?

However, after some reflection, Mr. Marsden could not bring his mind to do so. It must not be supposed that he was restrained by moral considerations. He really hardly knew what such things meant ; but he determined, on his usual principle of balancing “ the odds,” that it would pay him better to keep his shop open. Of course it will be borne in mind that Mr. Marsden’s debts were only debts of honour, and Mr. Marsden might repudiate them as safely as Pennsylvania. The law is quite powerless to compel Mr. Marsden to redeem his tickets. It said to the public—if you will be such fools as to trust to “ tickets ” you must take your chance ; and the public were such fools, and always will be. Perhaps a cynic

might find himself wondering, as he reflected on this, how many of the “highly respectable” tradesmen of our great metropolis would pay *their* debts if the law left it entirely to their option, or their honour? Leaving it to their honour would undoubtedly be the same thing as giving a receipt in full to a great many of them.

Not only had Mr. Marsden’s professional practice disappointed him of late, but his domestic speculations had not progressed to his entire satisfaction. He had greatly courted the society of Mr. David Tonks of late. He had given him a general invitation to come to his house at all times, and special invitations innumerable. He had called at David’s office, as David said, incessantly, and taken David out to lunch, much against that honest young man’s wishes; for David did not want lunch, as he dined at three o’clock, and he certainly did not like Mr. Marsden to pay for him. He found it, however, utterly impossible to prevent this, as Mr. Marsden insisted on always “standing treat.”

“I’ve plenty of the ready, you know—always keep *my* purse well filled; there’s nothing like it, Mr. Tonks.”

Such were the excuses and boasts of Mr. Marsden on these occasions, as he invariably pulled out a very full purse, and rattled the gold about as if it were of no more account in his eyes than a lot of dried peas. Still Mr. Marsden’s object was not thoroughly attained. He saw clearly enough that David was very much in love with his daughter, but he could not perceive that cordial return of his affection on her part that he wished to observe. He watched them very narrowly, and used all his influence to inspire Fanny with a due regard for David; he even ventured to scold her, in David’s absence, for not being attentive enough to him.

After a time he abandoned this course, for he saw that the more he endeavoured to coerce Fanny’s affections, the less chance David stood of gaining them. This really arose from Fanny’s

delicacy, though Marsden imputed it to the "cussed obstinacy of those women, who're all alike." So Marsden resolved to give over his persecution of Fanny, and only indirectly encourage David on.

"He's such a muff," he said to himself, thinking of David; "he dangles about the girl, and looks at her, and sighs, and makes a jack-ass of himself; and if he'd just pluck up the spirit of a man he might go in and win. Why don't he ask the question straightforward and downright? I'll lay a pony she wouldn't say 'No'—and damme! if she did, I'd break her neck a'most!"

Meanwhile Mr. Marsden heard very often from Mr. Frisby, who informed him that he had got "leave of absence," and left Townley Park (where "young Mowbray" was play-acting, and making a fool of himself, with a girl that turned up her nose at him), and that he, Frisby, had gone back to Haslop Hall. Frisby further related that affairs had gone remarkably well between

him and the widow. At one time he thought that she meant to "turn rusty," and not have him; but she had altered her mind. He had "popped the question," and the answer was "Yes."

The truth is, that Mr. Frisby had gradually let fall so many mysterious hints about the late Mr. Tonks's affairs, and the circumstance of the present Mr. David Tonks making searching enquiries regarding everything connected with them, (which last was Mr. Frisby's own invention), that the widow Tonks had got very much alarmed. She began to look upon herself as somehow or other in the power of Mr Frisby. She half expected that he would suddenly pull the missing will out of his pocket, and frighten her into fits; and, altogether, she was so nervous in his presence, that she resolved to do anything he asked her, so as to secure his support. When, therefore, Mr. Frisby made her an offer of his hand and heart, the widow, who really wanted a husband (though she hated Mr. Frisby), thought

she had better accept him than run the risk of making so dangerous an enemy.

As soon as Frisby had been accepted, he wrote to Marsden to tell him that it was all right. He further suggested that Marsden might as well hand him up the will at once, because, although he hadn't paid him the hundred pounds yet, still it was the same thing—it was quite safe now, and so on. Mr. Marsden saw that it was time to decide on his own course, so, after no great deal of deliberation, he determined to take the part of David Tonks, whether that gentleman married his daughter or no. It appeared to him that David could not fail to evince his gratitude in a substantial form, and probably Fanny would take David with a fortune, even if she were not in love with him without one.

In the meantime he had no intention of losing his hundred pounds from Mr. Frisby either. As to sending Frisby the will, the thing was out of the question. He must first make Frisby actually marry the widow, and then make him pay him

the hundred pounds ; that done, he could turn round and tell Mr. Frisby that he didn't mean to hand him back the will at all, but give it up to the right heir of the late Mr. Tonks.

“ And so I shall get my money, which is fair ; Mr. Tonks will get *his* money, which is fair, too ; and Frisby will be saddled with the widow, and pretty considerably done—and serve him right too, for trying to cheat other people.”

Uttering this sentiment to himself, and feeling a highly moral man under the influence of it, (a very novel sensation for him), Mr. Marsden sat down and wrote a note to Frisby, excusing himself for not sending the will ; but Frisby must know that business is business, and really he couldn't expect him to give up his only security until he got his money.

Frisby was rather savage when he received the letter, but he consoled himself with the reflection that it didn't make much difference. He had only to make haste and get married, and then he could at once pay the hundred pounds, and

get the will, which he would very decidedly thrust between the bars of the first kitchen grate he came near. So Frisby grew more loving than ever with the widow Tonks, and was so urgent that the blushing dame consented to name an early day. The banns were published, the knot was tied, and Frisby was a happy and a fortunate man.

About a week after Mr. Frisby's wedding-day, our friend, Mr. Marsden, was again sitting in his little sanctum at the back of the quiet cigar shop before described, when a ring summoned him to the door, and opening it, he beheld the happy bridegroom.

"Ah, Frisby, my dear fellow, is it you?" said Marsden: "I congratulate you. 'Pon my soul, matrimony agrees with you, you just *do* look well. Come in, come in."

"Well, captain, and how are you?" said Frisby.

"Very so so," said Marsden.

"Business slack?" asked Frisby.

“Worse than that,” replied Marsden; “plenty of it—too much—but shocking bad luck.”

“Ah, I was afraid you might have been hit on the Leger,” said Frisby.

“Hit! I believe you,” replied the other. “Fifteen hundred clean gone.”

“You don’t say so!” exclaimed Frisby, not believing a word of it.

“Fact!” said Marsden.

“Well, captain, I’ve brought you something—just a lift in hard times, you know. There, there’s a cool hundred for you—that’s the figure, I fancy, aint it?”

“That’s it,” replied Marsden; “and you’re a man of your word, Mr. Frisby. Let me see, I’ve an I. O. U. to hand you back.”

“*And* the will,” said Frisby.

“Ah—yes—the will.”

“I hope you haven’t lost it,” cried Frisby, a little frightened at Marsden’s tone.

“Oh, no—it’s safe enough, somewhere. Let me see, though—I don’t think it’s here. No, it

isn't here. Here's the I. O. U. though," he said, pocketing the one hundred pounds, and handing Frisby back his memorandum.

"I hope you'll manage to find the will," said Frisby, in alarm. "Couldn't you just look again?"

"No, it aint here," replied Mr. Marsden; "I know I've got it safe enough at home in a tin box."

"When'll you be going homewards, then?" inquired Frisby, "because I don't mind walking with you."

"Well, I don't think that I shall go home till lateish to-night," said Marsden.

"But couldn't you manage to send up for the box, or give me a letter to Mrs. Marsden, or something of that sort?" said Frisby. "You see I want the will, and business *is* business, you know, captain, as you very properly said yourself."

"Well, now, I tell you what is," said Marsden, putting on a swaggering air, and making

up his mind for a row ; “ I don’t mean to give you up that will at all.”

“ What !” shrieked Frisby.

“ No, I don’t, now, so there’s the long and the short of it,” continued Marsden.

“ You’re joking,” said Frisby, gasping for breath, but trying to look as if he enjoyed the joke.

“ No I *aint*—nothing of the sort—not a bit of it,” said Marsden.

Frisby looked paler than ever, though whether rage or fear predominated in his mind, the profoundest physiognomist could not have determined, so evenly were the two feelings balanced.

“ Now look here !” continued Mr. Marsden, for Frisby couldn’t speak a word—“ don’t you think it’s a cruel and wicked action as you want to be guilty of, robbing a man of his rightful property ? You know very well that you and your wife aint a bit of right to the old man’s tin at all, except forty pounds a-year. It all be-

longs to my friend, Mr. David Tonks, and you want to go and chisel him out of it. I wonder you *aint* ashamed for yourself, Mr. Frisby, to think of such a thing."

"Why?" stuttered Frisby, half choking; "why, you helped me."

"How can you go and tell that audacious lie?" exclaimed Marsden. "Haven't I kept the will safe ever since you gave it me, and aint I going to hand it up to Mr. Tonks now?"

"N—o, n—o, you wouldn't go and do that," cried Frisby, trying to force a grin, and looking like a sea-sick man trying to appreciate a pun.

"Wouldn't I, though? I just *do* mean to do it, and so there's no mistake about it."

Frisby was now getting furious. Coward as he was, his rage was becoming too strong for his control.

"You're a—you're a d——d villain!" he screamed.

"No I *aint*," said the other, enjoying the other's pain, and feeling quite secure from per-

sonal violence, by reason of his own superior size and strength; "that's what you are, and what you want to make me, but you can't, you see."

"Didn't you make me marry that cursed widow?" cried Frisby.

"Why, what a shocking husband you must be," said Marsden, "to talk like that of your blessed wife—in the honeymoon, too—ha! ha!"

"Forty pounds a year," groaned Frisby.

"And that'll have to be mortgaged to make up the arrears, you know," said Marsden, with a grin; "you'll have to cash up all the money as she has spent of the estate, in course."

"Damn you!" screamed Frisby, writhing with rage, "I'll prosecute you for the theft. I'll ——I'll——"

"No you won't," said Marsden, quite coolly; "there's a place they call Botany Bay, you know, and they send fellows there for conspiracies and felonies like that—you understand."

Frisby positively uttered a scream like a wild

beast, and seizing a heavy ruler from the table, he whirled it at Marsden's head with all his force, and rushed out of the house.

The blow was well aimed. It caught Marsden across the left eye and the temple, and it stunned him, for he fell heavily on to the floor, while the blood flowed from an open wound.

Two hours later, some betting gentry, who had made several attempts to attract the attention of the owner of the little cigar shop, by hammering at the door and ringing the bell, alarmed the people of the house, asking where Captain Marsden might be. The people of the house did not know, but they went to the shop inner door, and knocked again and again. At last the landlord of the house opened the door with his own key, and there lay Mr. Marsden in a pool of blood, and quite insensible.

"Call the police! send for a doctor!" cried the landlord. The latter was easily found, but it took some time to catch the former.

The doctor said it was a bad thump, and the

police searched Mr. Marsden's pockets, because the landlord did not know his private address. As the police found his cards, and also plenty of money, they paid every attention to Mr. Marsden, and so did the doctor. He began to revive after a time, though very weak and faint, and they fetched a cab and took him home to Pentonville.

CHAPTER XIII.

A GREAT change had come over the party at Townley Park. Many of the visitors had quitted it, and the new arrivals did not compensate for the absence of the others.

Dashwood, Saville, and Frank Nugent, were all men to be missed in quiet country quarters. The first was a kind of universal genius, whose shooting was as much appreciated by the gentlemen as his singing by the ladies. Saville was one of those good-humoured fellows who never taste melancholy themselves, and try to the utmost of their power to prevent others from indulging in it. And Frank Nugent, though rather stupid of late, from being in love, was

still entertaining in his way, and without greatly excelling in anything, was sufficiently accomplished to contribute his share of amusement to the general stock.

Gerard Mowbray was now decidedly the "great card" among the young men at Townley Park. He, too, was accomplished, well read, well mannered, and decidedly handsome. And yet there was never a man with such great personal advantages who appeared to make so little impression on young ladies. At first glance there was something perplexing in this. What is it that women care for beyond accomplishments, talents, good breeding, good looks? Wealth, certainly: but Mowbray had that also. And good character, doubtless: but Mowbray's was stainless. Amiability, perhaps. But who shall decide what *is* amiability?

Mowbray's temper was even enough. No one had ever seen it ruffled. He had nothing of moroseness or testiness about him. Indeed, his best friends pronounced him "always in a good

humour." Very merry he decidedly was not ; he had not much taste for merriment of any kind. Nature had cast him in a cooler mould than that of wits and jokers. Still he could appreciate wit in others, if he did not value it very highly.

The most remarkable thing about him was his perfect self-reliance, and self-possession. For Mowbray was a young man ; and yet he had the air of a man of forty or fifty. He never was known to ask the advice of any human being, and he certainly was slow enough to offer his own to others, or even to give it when asked. In some respects he was like Dashwood ; but then Dashwood was an older man, and one in whom a keen observer could read the strong passion which habitual self-control kept concealed from vulgar eyes. Now Mowbray had no such passions to conceal. He was calm and unmoved, not by an effort, not by a will which he forced upon himself, but by nature. He had eyes for beauty--because he had taste and sense, not

because he had passion. He could mark the blush upon a maiden's cheek, or watch the bright glance of her eyes with pleasure, because his artistic sense of beauty was gratified ; but neither of them caused the slightest quickening of his pulse, or throbbing of his heart—for he really possessed nothing like what we ordinarily understand by the word "heart."

It must have been this deficiency, then, that women, with their keen insight into character, at once detected. Not that they minutely analyzed his character—women never do that, and never need to do it. They *felt* it ; and, after all, the knowledge that we attain by a sort of inward, though, perhaps, inexplicable, conviction is the safest and soundest of all. It seldom errs, for it is God's teaching. It comes not through the dull, slow routes of books and experience, but flashes light-like at once into the soul, and there abides. Reason and logic cannot stir it thence, neither can they explain its advent.

And so Gerard Mowbray had never yet been

loved. Some few damsels had now and then been attracted by his handsome person and his other remarkable characteristics, but ere passion had time to grow, or to shape itself into form, the fancy died away. There was not a spark from whence to kindle a flame in the cold temperament of Gerard Mowbray. * The damsels were chilled when they approached the human ice-house, and retired as speedily as possible from the contact. And by degrees it came to pass that the dowagers, who want no flame, thought Gerard Mowbray the perfection of a young man, while their daughters and granddaughters shrunk from the idea of loving a person who might have served very well for a papa or an uncle, or some one to whom they could look up with respect, and "all that sort of thing," without the necessity of so much as even *thinking* of tenderness.

It was somewhat different with the men. They liked Mowbray, and especially his seniors showed a fondness for his society. He had seen much of

the world, and understood it, which those who see most of it often fail to do. As Sam Slick quaintly says, "Seein' is believin' ; but it ain't always them as stares the hardest that sees the most." Many a man "stares hard" at the world up to the age of sixty, has "surveyed mankind from China to Peru," and yet has gained little practical knowledge of the world. The mental organ of vision has been out of order all the while ; while some young fellow, with the peculiar perception required for the study, has read the great book of human nature, and comprehended it at thirty. Such was the case with Gerard Mowbray.

Colonel Danvers was greatly attracted by the young man. He was sorry that he was "only a civilian," for that was always a defect in the gallant Colonel's eyes. But, after all, it was a pardonable one, for, perhaps, it was not Mowbray's own fault that he had quitted the army. At all events, it was in his favour that he had *once* been in it.

Colonel Danvers was not naturally a man to trouble himself about looking out for a suitable husband for his daughter, and yet the thought had once or twice crossed his mind that he should like Captain Dashwood for a son-in-law—provided, of course, that Dashwood's family (of which he at present knew nothing) turned out to be unexceptionable; for a *parvenu* was his detestation. The departure of Dashwood made him cease to think on the subject, till, by degrees, conversing daily with Mowbray, and observing, perhaps, the latter's great attention to Flora, the Colonel began to ask himself how he should like Gerard to win his daughter's heart? The answer was certainly favourable to Mowbray's interests. Birth, breeding, talent, and wealth—there was not much wanting, to be sure. A very unreasonable father would he be who was not satisfied with such a combination of recommendations in the suitor of his daughter.

Other thoughts, however, now engrossed the mind of Colonel Danvers. Information had been

conveyed to him, through the commanding officer of Lionel's regiment, that there was reason to apprehend a great embarrassment in the pecuniary affairs of that young gentleman. The hint was not given to injure Lionel, but to serve him, as the commanding officer feared that Lionel's want of determination to divulge his own position would only tend to hurry him still more rapidly along the road to ruin.

"Flora," said Colonel Danvers, hastening to his daughter's room, "I want to speak to you on urgent affairs."

Flora looked alarmed, but guessed the meaning.

"I have had this letter to-day," he continued, "regarding Lionel—read it."

She did so, and saw that her surmise was correct.

"Is this true, do you think?" asked her father, earnestly.

"I—" Flora hesitated, for she knew not what

to say. Truth pointed one way, dread of her father's displeasure the other.

"For God's sake! do not hesitate or prevaricate," exclaimed her father, earnestly, but not in anger. "You have ever been the soul of truth and candour, Flora—answer me fully."

"It was for your sake, and for Lionel's, that I hesitated," she replied, faintly.

"Fear nothing for either of us," rejoined her father, hastily; "concealment will do more harm to both than any revelation can effect."

"It is true, then, I fear," she continued. "Lionel is very much in debt—at least, not very much, but—"

"How much?" asked the father, earnestly.

"Between two and three thousand, I think," said Flora, "not more."

"More!" exclaimed the Colonel. "My God! we are ruined!" and he buried his face in his hands, and shuddered with emotion.

Flora hastened to throw her arms round him, and to entreat him to be calm. She was really

alarmed at his excitement, and not less surprised. She had expected him to be very angry, and to hear him protest vehemently against Lionel's extravagance; but to see him thus cast down and crushed by the mere mention of the amount of his son's debts, astounded her.

The amount was certainly considerable, but still it did not appear very frightful to Flora's eyes, for people of their position in society and supposed means. She was aware of her brother's extravagance, and she guessed rightly that it must have made inroads on Colonel Danvers' patrimony, but she could not suppose that there would be very much difficulty in still finding two or three thousand pounds to pay her brother's debts.

"Flora," said her father, looking up after a pause, with a face of ashen paleness, "we are ruined. I *cannot* raise such a sum as you have named. No, I cannot, for I have tried in vain for another purpose. What will become of us?"

"But, my dear father ——" Flora began.

“Hush, my child,” he said, kindly, interrupting her; “you do not know how we stand—I will try to explain it to you. You know that my fortune was never very large, though sufficiently good, with ordinary prudence. Alas! that has been wanting. When first I married your mother I was so completely infatuated, that she had but to express a wish, and I hastened to gratify it, irrespective of all thoughts of expense. Thus I set her, at the very commencement, a bad example. I own it at once, because I do not wish to disguise from myself to whom the first blame is due for all that has followed. We have always lived beyond our means, Flora—terribly beyond them. Acre after acre of my land has been mortgaged, and you cannot tell the struggle it has cost me to part with what I have inherited from a long line of ancestors—not noble, perhaps, but men who have lived on their estate for more than five hundred years. But there was no help for it. Within three years from the day of our marriage, we were eighteen thousand

pounds in debt. That was the amount of my first mortgage, or rather, it was twenty thousand, for we wanted the difference to go on with. After this, we retrenched a little. I insisted on some reduction of our establishment, and it was made. But, Flora, it is not a house and servants, and a few dinner parties, that ruined me—it is *personal* extravagance: it is the wantonly throwing away money on objects of no earthly value in themselves, and which, like a child's toys, are soon cast aside and disregarded. Before two more years had passed, Flora, I was presented with bills incurred by her ladyship alone for more than five thousand pounds.”

Flora uttered an exclamation of surprise.

“No doubt you are astonished,” continued her father; “but it is a simple truth that I am telling you. I will not trouble you with any of the particulars of these odious debts—I would rather forget them. Suffice it, that they were all for ‘self’ alone. I raised money again, and paid them.

“Once more I renewed my protest against this wanton extravagance, and for a time it had its effect. But it was only for a time. Again and again the same thing occurred, and my property—the property of my children—was being wasted by degrees in mere madness.

“As you and your brother grew up, I saw the difference of character in you. I saw that Lionel inherited his mother’s extravagance and his father’s yielding disposition. In you, on the contrary, I perceived a greater strength of principle, a greater firmness. Perhaps I ought not to have let Lionel join the army, for I confess that it is *not* a good school to teach economy. But we have been a family of soldiers, and I could not refuse myself the pleasure of seeing my son embrace my own loved profession. I contrived that he should join a regiment ordered for Indian service, and so he might escape a portion of the temptation surrounding a young officer.

“Lionel did no great harm in India. He overdrew his allowance, it is true, but not much.

When, however, his regiment returned to England, he launched out. I know, dear Flora, how *you* have tried to check him in these courses, but it was in his blood to be extravagant, and remonstrances have proved of no avail.

“Again and again have I paid his debts—not a large sum, certainly, but the whole of them form a serious amount. I, who have never been personally extravagant, have yet been forced to pay incessant visits to my solicitor to raise funds, now for your mother, and now for Lionel. You cannot tell, Flora, how humiliating this has been to my spirit, not to mention the horrible reflection that the property which should have descended untouched to my heirs, was dwindling away to nothing.

“Within this month, Flora, I have had to raise three thousand pounds on your mother’s account—I wanted *four*. My solicitor said it was impossible to procure it on the security. We have come to the end of the letter, Flora—we can raise no more.”

Again he sunk his head upon his hands, and again Flora, shocked and stunned as she felt at the intelligence he had just given her, embraced her father gently and tenderly, and tried to soothe his anguish.

“I have yet my commission,” said the Colonel, after a time kissing his daughter’s pale cheek; “I can sell *that*.”

“No, no!” exclaimed Flora, hastily; “it must not be. Neither God nor man could require such a sacrifice of you, my dear father. To abandon the profession you have loved so much and have adorned so well, to pay the wretched Jews, who have no doubt *reckoned* on such a sacrifice from you—it cannot and must not be. Let Lionel at once sell *his*.”

“He is very young, Flora,” said the old man, gently; “he is yet but on the very threshold of life, and such a step inevitably casts him adrift in the world, and annihilates all his prospects. I am getting old fast; a few years more of existence are all that I can reasonably expect; and

what matter whether I wear a red coat or a black one during that brief space ?”

“ It *must not* be,” said Flora, with energy. “ Lionel has done evil enough ; but I do not believe him so lost to every generous feeling, as to purchase immunity from the ills he has brought upon himself, by robbing his father of his profession and his position in the world. Besides, what does Lionel care for the army ? I do not—indeed I do not wish to depreciate Lionel’s character ; but you are mistaken if you think he loves his profession as you do. It is gay associates he cares for more. He is young, as you say, and it is natural that he should feel this now. Is it not far better for him to part with his profession in youth, when he has not learnt to love it for itself, than in years to come, when he may be attached to it as you are ?”

“ But what can he do, if he *should* quit the army ?” asked the Colonel.

“ Work !” replied Flora, with emphasis.

The Colonel started, and looked almost shocked.

“Work!” repeated Flora; “why not? I see that you are shocked at the suggestion. But, my dearest father, do we not all allow ourselves to be blinded to the truth by the narrow notions of the little sphere we live in? What is there degrading in toil? Is it disgraceful, like debt? Is it painful, like want? Nay, is it not rather the very fulfilment of the Divine command given to the father of us all?”

“Flora—this is madness. Would you have my son—your brother—a *labourer*!”

“I would have him anything, so that he were honest,” cried Flora; “and God knows, I would help him with brain or hands in any toil he undertook. Pardon me, my dear father, if I speak too warmly; but I have thought long and often on these things, and I repeat, that I cannot but honour and respect honest toil of every grade—I cannot but loathe and fear debt and disgrace.”

“There is some truth in what you say, no doubt ——” began her father.

“Pardon me for interrupting you, dearest father,” said Flora; “but is it not *all* truth? What divine command, what human law, what duty to God or man do we break by toil? But do not suppose that I wish Lionel to turn mechanic or field-labourer—such a course would be absurd, and a wilful neglect of the better means of subsistence which education has placed in his hands. I have heard that it is hard for a gentleman to earn a livelihood in his own station—but at least there are thousands, millions, perhaps, who are doing it, and why should not another try? We are not destitute of friends we have many kind ones—and surely there are some among them who will find my brother employment, which even fastidiousness need not disdain, and which may provide for the wants even of a gentleman. To shew you that I do not preach a doctrine I cannot follow, I shall at once seek for the situation of a governess——”

“Never!” exclaimed her father.

“Do not say so,” cried Flora, “lest,” she

added, forcing a smile, "lest I should prove a disobedient daughter, and do it without your consent."

"But there is no need of such a step—indeed there is no need," said the Colonel. "I have an annuity of eight-hundred a year, which is untouched, and which *cannot* be mortgaged. This and my pay will surely keep us, Flora. What would be said of your father, if, with an income of fifteen or sixteen hundred a year, he allowed his daughter to go out as a governess? For *my* sake, Flora, I entreat you not to think of such a step."

"We will not speak of it at present," said Flora, wishing to evade the necessity of making any promise on the subject. "Let us talk of Lionel."

"What you have alluded to," rejoined her father, "about getting Lionel an appointment of some kind—such as in a government office—has certainly given me a new idea. I do not see any

great objection to such a course ; but it requires consideration.”

“ Certainly,” said Flora ; “ but remember, my dear father, that Lionel’s affairs are urgent, and too much delay may make things worse.”

“ Where is he—do you know ?” asked the Colonel.

“ In London, I believe,” replied Flora, trembling as she thought of the cause of his visit there ; “ but beyond that I know nothing.”

“ The least thing I can do is to go up to town and see if I can find him. I dare say I shall hear of him at his club. Meanwhile, I will write and secure him a longer leave of absence ; and it may even be necessary to get him over to France while we settle things. By the way, Dashwood might help me—Do you know his address ?”

“ No,” replied Flora—“ but I think you had better not apply to him ; indeed, I know that their feelings are not very cordial towards one another just now.”

And as Flora said this, she felt very miserable and very much alarmed.

“Does Lionel owe Dashwood anything?” asked the Colonel, as if a sudden thought had struck him.

“No—I know that he does *not*,” replied Flora, and she thanked God that she could with truth give that assurance.

The Colonel kissed her forehead, and with a heartfelt ejaculation of “God bless you, Flora!” he left her room.

As he came away from her door, Gerard Mowbray was mounting the staircase leading to the corridor. He saw the old man’s pale face and look of agitation, and he was not slow in divining the cause.

“There is something wrong in the family,” said Mowbray to himself, as he sat in his own chamber. “Money matters, no doubt. The old man cannot face duns, even though they are but his son’s and his wife’s. I see it all. Now

may come *my* turn. Flora Danvers is very perfect—all grace and intellect—yes!”

And he said it meditatively; and his face changed not, and the circulation of his blood did not quicken. His brain was quite cool, and his course seemed to him quite clear.

CHAPTER XIV.

HAVE our readers forgotten our old friend Mr. Melchisadech? We have been sadly forgetful of the good gentleman for a long time, and as he may not have much more to do with our little drama, we will call upon him to make his last appearance forthwith.

He is sitting in the same back parlour in the same Pentonville Square. The morocco-covered mahogany library table looks as imposing as ever; the dirty clerk is evidently as unaccustomed to soap and water as of yore; and the smart equipages which wait at the money-lender's door, and the smarter people who emerge

from them, are as constant and as numerous as when we last called.

The dirty clerk has just shown out a very gay young gentleman of sixty-three, who has gone a little beyond his means for the last five-and-forty years, in consequence of a *penchant* for the short petticoats of Her Majesty's Theatre, in the Haymarket. He has had a very pretty property in his time, but lawyers and mortgages, Jews and discount, dice-boxes and demireps, have made sad havoc with it. It was originally in three counties, it is now confined to a very small fraction indeed of one of them only. There is an excellent chance of its disappearing altogether some fine day, and our friend, Mr. Melchisadech, sees no lawful cause or impediment why a portion of it should not go into *his* coffers as well as into any one else's. The tastes, however, of the gay young gentleman of sixty-three remain the same, but the means of gratifying them are not so abundant. They are melting away, vanishing

into thin air at a rapid pace ; but they are not all gone yet. Mr. Melchisadech knows all about that. He knows exactly how far they *will* last out ; and to that extent Mr. Melchisadech intends to go—possibly even to a couple of hundred pounds beyond, that he may have the satisfaction of saying he has *lost* by the gay young gentleman. And then he will lock him up in the Bench, and the gay young gentleman will become a seedy old debtor, and will have to live on the county allowance, and to be buried at the county expense. There are plenty of such gay young gentlemen of sixty in existence, and Mr. Melchisadech knows most of them.

The dirty clerk now brings in a card, and lays it before Mr. Melchisadech, who reads—

“COLONEL DANVERS.”

And when he has read it, he looks just a very little bit astonished, and says, “At last, eh?”

The truth is, that Mr. Melchisadech knows

the Army List well—better than the quartermaster general. And he knows a great deal that the Horse Guards do *not* know. He has a very curious manuscript book in his own handwriting; and this book contains not only the names of every officer in the army who is worth any property at all, but also a few little memoranda as to what each one's property consists of. Some of the newly joined ensigns and 'cornets may, perchance, be unknown to him, but he is not long in finding out all about them, especially if they belong to "fast" regiments.

Now Mr. Melchisadech has had rather copious notes, and tolerably correct ones, too, in this manuscript book, touching Colonel Danvers, so that he knows the state of that gentleman's affairs almost as well as the Colonel himself. The money-lender by no means imagines that Colonel Danvers has come to him on his son's affairs, for he knows that sons are not confidential on such

matters to their governors. On the contrary, he has rather expected a visit from the Colonel some day or other, and as he knows the exact value of Colonel Danvers' commission, he is quite prepared as to the extent to which he can accommodate him.

All this flashes through Mr. Melchisadech's mind while he is merely saying—

“Show him in.”

The Colonel enters the room with a stiff bow. The money-lender hands him a seat, and is rather more *expressé* in manner than is his custom.

“I believe, sir,” begins the Colonel, “you have had some bill transactions with my son, Lieutenant Danvers.”

“I have had the pleasure to be connected with Lieutenant Danvers several times,” replied the money-lender, in his blandest tones.

“He owes you money?”

“Not exactly *me*, but friends of mine.”

“The same thing,” says the Colonel, shortly.

“Pardon me—no.”

“The effect is the same, at all events,” rejoins the Colonel. “He owes your *friends* money, then, and you have sued him for it.”

“*They* have sued him,” interposes Mr. Melchisadech.

“Do not let us bandy words,” answers the Colonel, testily; “I shall be no match for you there. Whenever I say *you*, you may, if you please, consider that I mean your ‘friends.’ As I said, the effect is the same. My son has borrowed money of you, and it has not been repaid?”

“A portion of it has not.”

“Very good. And he has been sued. And I suppose you have taken all the preliminary steps to arrest him?”

“We have got judgment, I believe,” said the

money-lender, evading the imputation of an intention to incarcerate Lionel.

“You will never be paid,” said the Colonel.

Mr. Melchisadech smiled very politely; but the Colonel saw that Mr. Melchisadech was of a very different opinion.

“At least,” pursued the Colonel, “you will not be paid unless you are disposed to accept a very much smaller sum than what you claim.”

“I thought so,” said the money-lender to himself; “a compromise proposed, I see—but it won’t do.” Then he said aloud—

“Pray proceed, Colonel.”

“I say, sir, that it is not possible for me to discharge what my son owes you—at least, what you claim: but I have no objection to pay you something.”

“You are exceedingly kind, Colonel Danvers, but you will remember that your son has his commission——”

“The sale of which will not pay all his debts,” interrupted the Colonel.

“Not all, certainly. Mr. Danvers, I presume, owes about two thousand seven hundred pounds,” said the money-lender, quietly.

“How did you know that?” asked the Colonel, hastily, for he was surprised at the extreme accuracy of the other’s information.

“A mere guess,” said the other, as the hawk’s eye twinkled more brightly than ever; “but a tolerably correct one, I perceive.”

“No matter,” answered the Colonel, angry at being so overreached in quickness; “I repeat, that the sale of his commission will not pay all his debts, and *I* cannot pay the difference, for I cannot command the money.”

“Excuse me, Colonel; you *can* command the money at once, if you please.”

“What do you mean, sir?” asked his visitor.

“Simply, that if you please to give me *your*

acceptance for fifteen hundred pounds, I shall be happy to return you your son's at once."

"Thank you ; you are very kind indeed, sir ; but I have never put my name to a bill yet, and I am not going *now* to commence a connection with a set of swindling, lying——"

"Ahem !" went Mr. Melchisadech, clearing his throat ; and he really looked so mildly reproachful, so gently remonstrative at the Colonel, that the latter checked himself in his vituperation, and said—

"Well, never mind ; I merely tell you this, Mr. Melchisadech, that if you reckon on ever getting *my* name on any of your stamped paper, you are very much mistaken indeed. Whatever may happen to my son, I shall not resort to those means of rescuing him."

He spoke with such decision, that even Mr. Melchisadech began to believe that he would adhere to his resolution.

"I know that some gentlemen *do* entertain a prejudice against bills," he said.

“ A prejudice ! is it a prejudice, sir, that we entertain against snakes and scorpions, and other loathsome reptiles ? Is it a prejudice we feel against pain, disease, misery, want, ruin ? A prejudice, forsooth ! call it rather a natural dread of doing that which must end in infamy, sooner or later.”

“ You feel very strongly on the subject, I see,” interposed Mr. Melchisadech ; “ and so perhaps we had better avoid further reference to it. You came, I presume, to offer me a compromise for your son’s debt, Colonel Danvers—I beg to decline it.”

“ Without even hearing what the offer is ?”

“ Without even hearing it,” replied the money-lender, quietly. “ I want my debt paid in full, and *I intend to have it*. If you would accept advice from so degraded a person as a Jew, I would just add, Colonel Danvers, that it may be prudent if you call other creditors of your son’s, not to insult them or their callings, even if they be

Jews. Allow me to accompany you to the door myself."

And so saying, Mr. Melchisadech bowed his visitor politely out of the house.

The Colonel went away in a sad ill humour. Not only had he failed in his object; not only had he exasperated the man he should have tried to conciliate; but he even felt and acknowledged that he had been beaten by this man on the very ground where a comparison between them would have seemed to him an insult—that of good breeding.

Very little success attended the Colonel's visit to town on the subject of his son's affairs. The creditors would listen to no terms, as creditors never will till the worst has happened; and he could not find out his son at all, for Lionel had never been near his club since he went to London.

And now we must return to Townley Park.

Our readers will not need our assurance of

the serious shock which Colonel Danvers' conversation with Flora had given to the latter. How troubles seemed to multiply ! How distant the period to which Flora, even in her short existence, must look back to look *beyond* them !

Lionel had robbed her of much of the repose of mind she might formerly have enjoyed by his incessant *escapades*. She loved him dearly, and she could not look upon these things as indifferently as other people. She saw the effect ; she knew to what his extravagance tended, to what it must inevitably lead him. When she found that he was not guilty of the foul act of dishonour imputed to him, she had rejoiced and felt as if she could henceforth bear anything. This feeling was increased, when she found also that his debts were but two or three thousand pounds, instead of the twenty or thirty she had been taught to believe. But alas ! now that she found the true state of her father's affairs to be

so deplorable a one, she could no longer feel the relief she had at first experienced.

It was bad enough for Lionel to be involved ; but that her father's means should thus have been wasted away, shocked her still more. And the thought that he might sell his commission and retire from the service, merely to raise the means of paying Lionel's debts of extravagance—this pained and grieved her inexpressibly.

“ Would to heaven that I could help him ! ” she exclaimed to herself ; “ I think there is no sacrifice I would not make . ”

And then Flora began to ask herself what sacrifices of hers *could* aid her parent, and she could see none. And she sat and wept, and felt heartbroken and powerless.

Her thoughts rambled strangely. Now she thought of Lionel, and now of Lionel's former friend, Dashwood. The same cold shudder crept over her that she always experienced

when she was with him formerly. She did not so much hate him as she recoiled from the very idea of him.

Next she came to think of Frank Nugent. The change was, indeed, a pleasing one. All that she had seen of Frank she admired. High principle, right feeling, intellect, gentleness ; there was scarce a fault to be found with him. And then she asked herself whether Frank had really and truly loved her, or whether he had played the hypocrite only.

To what end should he do so ? Why pretend to love the woman he cared nothing for, when the pretence could avail him nought ? Had she been an heiress of large wealth, it might have been explained ; yet even then she would not have admitted the explanation, for, poor as Frank was, she had failed to detect the least selfishness, the least wealth-worship, the least taint of avarice in his character.

What fault *did* she find ? She asked this

question again and again, and no satisfactory answer came to it. She thought over all his actions and all his natural qualities—she admired all. She thought of his attentions to her, his apparent devotion to her, his love—yes, yes—it *was* love—true, genuine, absorbing love; and she could not shut out that truth from her heart. Neither could she shut out the consciousness that in spite of every effort, her heart was still Frank Nugent's.

He was lost for ever now. No chance of their ever meeting again as they had met before. Did she desire it? No.

There was that fatal duel—there was its fatal cause. Oh! why had not Lionel explained himself more clearly? Why had he so cruelly left her only to surmise the very worst? She had confided in Mrs. St. Leger, and that kind friend had endeavoured to soften matters a little, and to make her think less harshly of Frank. But even *she* could only make excuses for him, and

not avoid the obvious conclusion to which Flora had herself arrived No : she did *not* desire to meet him again.

It was a long and a hard struggle between love and pride ; but pride was the victor now. It may be, that love shall triumph hereafter ; and it may be that his triumph will come too late to restore peace to Flora's wounded spirit, to pour balm into her wrung heart.

Colonel Danvers had returned to Townley Park vexed and unhappy at the want of success of his visit to London.

He reached Townley late in the afternoon, but before the ladies had returned from their drive, or the men from the turnip-fields. Only Gerard Mowbray was at home, and he was reading in the library.

The thought struck the Colonel that he would confide his present troubles to Mowbray. He had formed the highest opinion of the young man's judgment, and he believed him to un-

derstand the world so well, that he would be a good adviser as to the course he ought to pursue. He therefore went to the library, and began his tale.

Now Mowbray was expecting this revelation. Little did the Colonel think how often Mowbray had spoken to him in a way to induce him to volunteer this confidence. Little could he have understood the admirable tact with which the young man had contrived to draw him into such a state of mind as would induce him to act as he was now doing. And therefore the Colonel told his tale in a manly, straightforward, soldier-like way ; and he was pleased with the attention and respect with which Mowbray listened, and the pointed and excellent remarks he occasionally made.

Their conversation was long and earnest. An hour elapsed before they separated ; and at parting the Colonel grasped the young man's hand most warmly, while the rattling of carriage wheels

told that the ladies had returned from their drive.

A few minutes after, and the Colonel entered Flora's room.

"What success, my dear father?" she asked, as she fancied she saw a ray of light in her father's glance.

"None—at least none in London," he replied; and Colonel Danvers, strange to say, for he could not explain it to himself, felt ill at ease. "The creditors refuse to listen to any terms; the Shylocks *will* have their pound of flesh."

Flora sighed deeply, and hung her head. It was not more than she had feared; but her father's look had raised some faint hope of better fortune.

"Flora," said her father, "sit down, child; I want to speak to you on another matter—one that concerns yourself alone."

The daughter's heart beat quickly as she

tremblingly obeyed, and waited for her father to go on.

“Flora,” he continued, after a pause, “are your affections engaged?”

He turned his eyes on her as he asked this, and Flora’s fell. A blush, too, overspread her face and neck, and she trembled.

“Answer me,” he repeated, kindly.

“No,” she said, but faintly and tremulously.

“Are you *sure*?” he asked again, earnestly. “Do not deceive me.”

“They are *not*,” said Flora, more firmly, and she thought she spoke the truth.

“I fancied I saw something like a rising attachment,” said the Colonel, “between yourself and Captain Dashwood.”

“No, no, no,” interrupted Flora, hastily; “do not speak of him—I cannot bear the man—I *hate him*.”

The Colonel looked surprised at her sudden

energy ; but, at all events, her words satisfied him.

“ Then listen, dear child,” he said ; “ a proposal for your hand has been made to me this day.”

Flora uttered a sharp cry, as if something had stung her.

“ You are surprised,” said her father, misunderstanding her ; “ but, indeed, Mr. Mowbray’s offer was made in terms which could not fail to flatter any father, nor, I think, to gratify any daughter.”

“ And you answered——”

“ Stay—he did not want a further answer than this—that I would grant him full permission to pay his addresses to you, and that I would not refuse him your hand should he first gain your heart. Could anything be more honourable ?”

“ Nothing,” said Flora, faintly, for she was sick at heart.

“Then I beg of you, Flora, dearest, to think kindly of him. He is a man of excellent family, a man of property. He has intelligence, which you value so highly ; he has excellent principles, and I think you will allow that he is in every respect a gentleman.”

“Yes,” answered Flora, even more faintly than before.

“Flora, dear, I will leave you now. I know that such a communication as I have made to you must agitate a young girl greatly. Do not think too much on the subject, and do not make me any answer about it now. You know my opinion, you know my wishes ; but God forbid that I should *force* your affections. Kiss me, child.”

She kissed him—how cold her lips were—and he left the room. And Flora Danvers threw herself upon her bed, and sobbed and wept as if her very heart—her noble, generous heart—would burst. And all was fixed then for her, no ray of

light left now ; a future of utter misery and desolation of the soul's affections.

Gerard Mowbray had lent Colonel Danvers three thousand pounds on the simple insurance of the Colonel's life.

CHAPTER XV.

THE object of Lionel Danvers' sudden departure from Townley Park was, of course, to seek out Captain Dashwood, and wreak vengeance on him for the infamous use he had made of his name to gain his own purposes. But Lionel had hard work to find the captain, for Dashwood was not anxious to be traced. He had given particular directions to his agents to give his address to no one; and now that he had left the army, the usual facilities for discovering it did not exist. So that Lionel, after being several days in town, still found himself foiled in all his attempts to unearth his enemy.

Lionel chafed terribly at this; he had left

Townley Park boiling with natural indignation at the wrong that had been done him, and with his temper greatly chafed by the discussion with Flora on the state of her own affections. It is true that he had every reason to believe that he had settled that matter as he desired, for he had seen how shocked Flora had been at his revelation concerning Frank. But still her implied confession that she loved that man, and her refusal to submit to his own dictation on the subject, had very much irritated him. So Lionel, thwarted in his desire for revenge, and otherwise out of humour, walked about London like a caged lion, lashing himself with increased fury.

He had been in town nearly a fortnight, when a sudden thought struck him. Dashwood's tailor was his own—he might learn the address there. How absurd not to have thought of it before! He made the enquiry. The man of measures told him that the Captain had forbidden him to give his address to *any one*; but as he knew Mr. Lionel Danvers to be such a very intimate friend

of his,—of course he couldn't suppose that the Captain meant the interdiction to apply to him—and so he gave it him,—it was in Cork Street.

Lionel lost not a moment in hastening to the address given, and asked for Captain Dashwood. It happened that Dashwood's own servant was in the hall at the moment, and knowing the great intimacy between Lionel and his master, and being ignorant of any quarrel between them, he without notice showed Lionel into the very room where Dashwood sat lounging in an easy chair, and reading the last new novel.

It must be confessed that the Captain was taken by surprise, but his wonderful coolness scarcely deserted him for a moment, though he read at a glance the state of Lionel's mind.

“Villain!” cried Lionel, walking up to him.

“Evans,” said Dashwood to his servant, who was closing the door, “you have made a mistake in shewing this gentleman up—I don't know him.”

This was said in so natural and quiet a tone,

that Evans opened his eyes, and started in bewilderment, while Lionel himself was staggered for a moment.

“Impudent scoundrel!” he exclaimed, recovering himself; “do you —”

“Fetch a policeman, Evans,” said the Captain, in the same tone as before; “the gentleman is deranged.”

The table was between Lionel and Dashwood; Lionel uttered a cry of rage, and sprung round to Dashwood.

The latter stepped back, twisting the chair from which he had risen round so as to intercept his adversary, and drawing a small pistol from his breast pocket at the same moment, he levelled it at him.

“You had better remain quiet,” he said, “or leave the room—as you please.”

“Cowardly hound!” cried Lionel, drawing back—“ready armed for assassination.”

“A little precaution—not unnecessary, you see

when young gentlemen are about, who cannot control their tempers."

A policeman entered the room at this moment with Evans.

"Thank you, policeman," said Dashwood; "but I don't think I shall need your services at present; the gentleman will leave the room quietly. You may go; give him a glass of wine, Evans."

The policeman, looking rather glad to be let off, left the room with Evans. Lionel had slightly cooled in temper, though he felt more vindictive than ever.

"Will you not give me satisfaction for your villany?" he cried.

"Certainly," replied Dashwood, still unchanged in tone and demeanour; "I will give you the satisfaction of a gentleman for any fancied harm I may have done you, whenever you choose to ask it *as a gentleman*."

"You shall hear from me this afternoon," said Lionel.

“Be it so : I am glad that your *savoir faire* is restored.”

So saying, he bowed, and rang the bell, as Lionel stalked with savage looks out of the room, to do, what it now struck him he had better have done at first—send his highly respected friend, Major Tallboys, to wait on Captain Dashwood.

The next morning, Lionel Danvers and Captain Dashwood were on Wimbledon Common, at twelve paces apart ; and when Captain Dashwood left Wimbledon Common, it was with a bullet in him, in a dangerous locality. Lionel was unwounded.

Two days after this event, Frank Nugent was in his little room at work, writing, or trying to write—hard work, when the heart is ill at ease.

The servant entered his room with a letter just arrived by post. Frank took it, and saw that it had been addressed to him at Townley Park, and re-addressed thence. For a moment Frank acted that piece of absurdity we are all

guilty of sometimes—he turned the letter over, and wondered who it could be from (for he did not know the hand-writing), instead of breaking it open at once to ascertain the fact. At last he *did* open it, and read as follows:—

“ Captain Dashwood will take it as a favour if Mr. Nugent will call on him without delay. As this is the request of a dying man, Mr. Nugent will not hesitate to comply with it.

“ No. —, Cork Street,

“ Thursday.”

“ What on earth can be the meaning of this mystery?” thought Frank. “ The writing is certainly tremulous like that of a sick man—but what can Captain Dashwood want with me?”

There was no time for deliberation, however, in such a case. Fortunately, only a few hours, and not a whole day, had been lost by the double journey of the letter—thanks to a morning post from Townley Park. Frank started immediately—took a cab, and drove to Cork Street.

On arriving at Dashwood's lodgings, Frank was first received by Evans, the servant, who knew him.

"What is the matter, Evans?"

"It's a duel, sir," replied Evans.

"With whom?"

"With Mr. Danvers, sir: I'm afraid it's all over with my poor master."

"You don't mean that he's dead!"

"No, sir! but there's no hope of his recovery."

"And Mr. Danvers—what of him?"

"He was unwounded, sir; master fired in the air. But I mustn't keep you, sir: it's the only thing he talks of—to keep asking if you have come."

The doctor entered the room from Dashwood's bed-chamber, which was next to it.

"Is it Mr. Nugent?" he asked.

"Yes," said Frank, bowing.

"You must see my patient, sir: for he will take no refusal. Of course I do not know the

nature of the conversation that is to pass between you —— ”

“ Nor I,” said Frank.

“ But,” continued the doctor, “ he ought not to exert himself much. Not that there is the slightest chance of preserving life : it is but a question of lingering for a longer or shorter time ; but violent excitement will hasten death.”

“ I cannot think that there will be anything of the kind between us,” said Frank.

“ *I* think otherwise, from his anxiety to see you,” replied the doctor ; “ though his self-command is the greatest I have ever seen. I will tell him that you are here.”

He retired for a moment, and then returned, and ushered Frank into Dashwood’s presence.

The wounded man was lying in a half-darkened room ; but, in spite of the obscurity, Frank noticed the deadly pallor and the leaden look of the eyes, that told him of death’s finger. Yet, even in that state, there was the same air of self-

possessed, dignified coolness that Dashwood had always displayed in health.

“ I’m glad to see you,” he said, as Frank entered. “ Will you be good enough to take a seat near to me? I have much to say, and I fear you will find my voice rather weak.”

“ Pray do not exert yourself without necessity,” said Frank. “ The doctor recommends quiet.”

“ There *is* necessity,” said Dashwood, “ and it matters not what the good doctor recommends. He is only here,” he said with a smile, “ to see me decently out of the world. I have nearly an ounce of cold lead in me, and where it cannot be removed without killing me, and where its remaining will have the same effect. So you see I have simply a choice of deaths, and prefer the quieter.”

“ There’s always hope,” suggested Frank, though he would have persuaded himself that *he* had none in another case.

“ Yes ; but not always to the effect that you

mean. I, too, have hope—it is the hope to do one act of justice before I die. I do *not* hope to live—I am not even sure that I should consider life a boon. You will find that death is not so shocking, when once you have made up your mind to it. ‘This pain now,’ he said, as the muscles of his face contracted for a moment with a sudden agony—“this pain *is* hard to bear. Death is in some sense an idea—pain is a fact. We have more control over our minds than our bodies, and so we can overcome the ideal horrors, while our flesh *will* writhe at the corporeal ones. But I must not discuss metaphysics. You are astonished at my sending for you, Mr. Nugent, especially as we were not very cordial as acquaintances.”

“I hope you will not think of such trifles now,” said Nugent.

“No; besides it was natural that we should not love one another—we were rivals. I leave the field now, you see; you have no opponent in it.”

“ I have left Townley Hall,” said Frank, colouring, “ and am not likely ever to see the lady you refer to, again.”

“ Indeed—how so ?” asked Dashwood, forgetting for a moment his own affairs in his curiosity about this hint of Frank’s.

“ It would be a long story,” said Frank ; “ but I was long ago forced into a duel with her brother”—

“ You ! indeed : we are brothers in misfortune then ; he has robbed you of a mistress (if you mean that you are discarded on account of that duel), and me of life. Is *that* the cause ?”

“ Yes.”

“ A very bad one,” said Dashwood. “ You would have done the world no harm had you sent that puppy out of it. I don’t say so because he has shot me—I deserved *that* ; but he is a paltry fellow, and has no doubt given his sister a lying account of your conduct in the matter. Pardon me if I do not thoroughly pity you ; but I am selfish to the last. I could not win Flora.

I shall go out of the world with the satisfaction of feeling that no one else *has* won her."

Dashwood paused for a minute, and then went on again—

"I am as garrulous as an old fish wife, instead of being chary of the little breath I have left. I have a secret to reveal to you, Mr. Nugent; but I wish to give you a sketch of my own life—why, I can scarcely tell—but the desire is strong in me, and as it is the last I can reasonably expect to feel, I think I may be allowed to gratify it. Now, as the secret I have to tell you concerns yourself, I shall postpone it till I have given you my own history, because if you knew it first you might be too much engrossed by it to listen to me. Will you hear me?"

"I will do any thing you wish," said Frank.

"Thank you. Draw that curtain a little closer. My eyes are very weak, and even that light affects them." Frank did as he was asked.

"You will hear no wonderful history," said Dashwood; "but some light and shade there is

in it. A little ray of light here and there, and two or three deep dark patches blotting the picture—the rest is the mere common-place—would it had all been so ; but the demon of passion within me, though chained at times, has often been let loose, and fearful have been its revels. Listen.”

CHAPTER XVI.

“I WAS born an outcast—an illegitimate son. My father was a man of some fortune, and he was of an old family. My mother was a simple village girl, whom he seduced. Of course they did not live together, but he provided for her necessities, and from the first he displayed affection for his child. I recollect little about my mother, for she died when I was young—of grief, I believe, for her own fall, and my father’s refusal to marry her, which she had hoped that he would do after my birth. Poor woman! she little knew the man’s heart—he was proud as Lucifer; too proud to do an act of justice, you

will observe, but not too proud to seduce an ignorant girl.

“As you hear my life you will think that, at least, he atoned to *me* for his sin, by treating me with uniform kindness, and leaving me his fortune. I thought otherwise. I hated him living—I hate and curse his memory, dead.”

“Horrible!” exclaimed Frank. “Your own father!”

“Yes, my own father,” continued Dashwood; “what of that? Did he not wrong my mother? did he not wrong me, his yet unborn offspring? did he not bring me into the world branded from my birth? did he not infuse into my heart, with that very brand, the fierce hatred for himself I now feel, and the contempt for the moralities of society I have ever felt and shown? We were natural enemies—this father and myself; the enmity is not extinct in me even now, upon this my death-bed.

“My father gave me a good education, but not in England. It was partly in Germany, but

principally in France, that I was brought up. I knew, in my earliest school-days, the stigma that attached to my position, and bitterly did I feel against its author.

“At eighteen my father came to me in Paris, and told me he wished to consult with me about my future profession. Had I any choice? ‘The army,’ I replied. He raised some objections. ‘The army,’ I repeated, ‘or nothing—as you please.’

“‘You are forgetting who you are, and who I am,’ said my father.

“‘No, I am your bastard son; you are the seducer of my mother,’ I replied.

“He looked at me in horror, and was speechless for a few moments after I had uttered these simple truths.

“‘I am sorry to perceive this frightful spirit in you,’ he said, after a time: ‘do you forget that you are dependent on me, and on me alone?’

“‘I am not,’ I replied, ‘dependent on you, nor will I ever be dependent on any one. Do

what you please for me, and refuse what you please: it would be a worthy sequel to the seduction of my mother, to leave her son penniless.'

" 'Great Heaven!' cried my father, 'how am I punished! Do you not know how I have spent my money freely to afford you every comfort on earth, and to give you the education befitting a gentleman?'

" 'I know that you have refused the only sacrifice which could make one grain of atonement for your crime,' I replied; 'you refused to marry my mother; you avoided taking me home, and acknowledging me before the world as your son.'

" 'I need not weary you with more of our conversation. My father shed tears, which did *not* affect me—as tears never *have* affected me since. I maintained my sullenness, but I gained my end. Within a month I was gazetted to a cavalry regiment.

" 'I was perfectly conscious of the false position in which I stood on joining my regiment. I

knew that I should be scorned by any one of the high-born legitimates who were my comrades, if they had the slightest idea of the nature of my antecedents ; so I chose my own part from the very commencement. I assumed a cold and distant demeanour, not inviting to intimacy. I was voted proud and unsociable, but I gained my end. No one ventured to ask me impertinent questions on any subject. At the same time, as I had a good command of money, and more accomplishments than any one of them, I became a popular man, without being a favourite—that is to say, I was looked up to and sought after. I had some taste, perhaps, in dress and equipage, and I was soon referred to in such matters ; and so, by degrees, I was invited into the society of the families of my brother officers. This was the object I had in view—to get my footing in society, not as one *tolerated* in it, but as one courted and caressed there.

“ Perhaps I felt my own false position all the same, now that I was received in good circles, as I

did when I was an outcast from them ; and, perhaps, the feeling added bitterness to my misanthropy.

“ After I had been four years in the army, my father died. He left all his money to me absolutely. He had no land, or, if he once had, he had sold it ; but his property amounted to rather more than sixty thousand pounds.”

“ Were you present at his death ? ” asked Frank.

“ No ; I was only informed of it by his solicitor, who knew the secret of my birth.”

“ Did not his generosity alter your sentiments towards him ? ” said Frank.

“ His generosity ! the generosity of leaving me what he could no longer enjoy ! Where was the generosity of the man who never, while living, acknowledged his own son ? Bah ! Well,” he continued, “ shortly after his death I went on half-pay—I did not wish to quit the army entirely, but I wanted to travel. I had so long been in the buckram of my own contriving,

(feeling constrained to keep constant guard on my words and actions, lest my secret should escape), that I longed for perfect liberty. I travelled half over Europe, and lived the life of a careless libertine."

"Did you gamble?" asked Frank.

"Yes, at times, but not to any extent, and not systematically. I followed that, like every other vice, because I resolved to taste them all. At length I found myself in Venice. Here I became attracted by the beauty of a woman, who was the wife of a tailor. A tailor's wife does not sound poetical, does it? but Rosa Vasari was a lovely creature, in spite of her low birth.

"She left her home and lived with me, at a place I had hired on the main land, away from the city. Her husband, it appears, was furious; I don't think he cared for his wife really, but it seems that he was jeered at and maddened by the coarse jests of his neighbours. One day I was sitting with Rosa in a room looking out on to our garden, when a man sprung from some

hiding-place, and shrieking out ‘Infamous woman!’ he ran towards his wife—for it was the tailor, Vasari. I was never without pistols, especially in that country. I drew one, and fired. The man fell—shot through the brain. Rosa uttered a piercing cry, and fell, actually lying in her husband’s blood. It was a horrible scene!”

The sick man for a moment lost his wonted indifference of tone and manner, and shuddered in spite of himself. After a minute’s pause he went on:—

“The servants ran in, attracted by the sound. We raised Rosa, and she recovered slowly from her swoon. Vasari was, of course, stone dead.

“‘Escape! escape! for the love of Heaven!’ cried Rosa; ‘the officers of justice will be here.’ She was right, for my own servants ran to fetch them; but before they arrived I had sprung into the garden and made my escape. I had great difficulty in getting away from Venice; but contriving to shave my beard and moustachios,

and effect other disguises, besides being a tolerable actor, I accomplished my object."

"What became of Rosa?" asked Frank.

"I never saw her again," replied Dashwood, "but she was imprisoned for her indirect concern in her husband's death, and died in prison."

Again he seemed slightly moved, but with a little effort he proceeded:—

"Fortunately, I was not travelling in my own name—I mean the name of Dashwood, which was my mother's, and that which I have always borne in England—but in that of my father; and as there were scarcely any Englishmen in Venice at the time, I ran little risk of being pointed out in England as the actor in this drama."

"Was there not *one*?" asked Frank.

"Yes, there was Gerard Mowbray."

"I thought so," replied Frank.

"Why? has he revealed—?"

"No," said Frank, "but he said that he met you in Venice years ago, when you were travelling, not under your present name."

“ He is right. We used to meet frequently before the catastrophe I have told you of; but never *since* that time, till we met at Townley Park.”

“ But to proceed—for I am getting weaker.”

“ Had you not better stop?” said Frank, in some anxiety.

“ No,” he replied; “ what matters it if I do shorten life by an hour or two? I had a strange fancy to give you the outline of my life—I must go on with it now. I returned to England, and got attached to a fresh regiment. Lionel Danvers was then a cornet in it. He was a weak, vain lad, who thought he distinguished himself by his extravagance. His allowance was just enough to keep him as a gentleman, and he lived as if he were heir to a dukedom. After all, he never had as good horses (though he often had more of them), nor gave as good breakfasts (though he spent more money on them), as I did. I saw that the lad aped my ways, and was amused. For myself, I never was in debt. My income was between

two and three thousand a year, and I never went beyond it: my success is partly due to this; for the fools who squandered their money senselessly were in a state of constant surprise at my owing nothing, and yet making a better appearance than themselves. They forgot that they were paying from sixty to two hundred per cent. for every sovereign they used—mine was unborrowed.

“Lionel Danvers courted my society. He invited me to visit him at his father’s country place. Curiosity to see the sister I had heard so much of from him, made me go. At Springfield I first met Flora Danvers. I need not describe her to *you*. For the first time in my life I loved—I had known only the grosser passion before. Now I loved truly, deeply, devotedly.

“The resolution I took was to win Flora at any cost—by any means. I strove with all the powers I was endowed with to gain her regard. I tried to alter my nature, when I knew it must be unamiable in a young girl’s eyes. I courted

her brother's society. I lent him money. It was all to no purpose.

“ Once only did I flatter myself that I had made any impression on her—it was when I watched by the sick bed of her brother, after he had been wounded in the duel—by you, it seems.

“ Flora seemed touched then ; but there was something which was wrong even then. I have since learnt that it was the embarrassment she felt on learning that her brother was my debtor, for the fool had told her of it.

“ The next time we met was at Townley Park. I still felt that Flora did not love me, though I had acquired much influence over her, in spite of herself. Foiled in every attempt to gain her by fair means, I tried foul ones. I represented her brother's debts as tenfold what they really were. I showed her a paper which . . . ” Dashwood's voice became broken here ; “ I meant to tell you *all*,” he said, “ but I find that I *cannot*.”

“ I played a villanous trick, and alarmed her for her brother's safety. Then, in the height of

her fear, I offered to redeem this brother, whom she loved so dearly, from every difficulty, and from the consequences of the crime I had invented for him, if she would consent to become my wife."

Frank muttered an imprecation which he could not restrain, even at that awful moment, by the sinner's death-bed. Dashwood heard it, and paused for a moment.

"I forgive you the curse," he said, "because I believe *you* to be honest, and I know that you love Flora Danvers. Well," he continued, "Flora did not answer me, but I read her answer in her looks. Before she could speak we were interrupted by Gerard Mowbray. He recognised me, and threatened to denounce me if I remained; he promised silence if I departed. My game was played out and lost; what use for me to remain? I went away at once. The rest you know."

"I had not heard of the duel till I came here," said Frank.

"Lionel has heard all, I presume, from his

sister," replied Dashwood ; " it could have but one ending."

" And you fired in the air ?" asked Frank.

" Yes," he answered ; " perhaps you think that strange, inconsistent with the rest of my life. But we are made of inconsistencies. I went to the field determined to shoot him : I altered my mind there, and let him, as you see, take *my* life instead."

" You will not allow yourself one good motive," said Frank ; " I have heard that you have fought in India with your regiment—fought nobly and bravely."

" I have given you more a confession than a biography," said Dashwood ; " it is my humour to do so. Therefore I have told you all the shades, and left out the few lights I promised you. It is too late now to fill them in. Tell me," he continued, " your mother's name was Mordaunt, was it not ?"

" It was," replied Frank, in some surprise.

" She had a brother ?"

“One: but he died when I was a child; I knew nothing of him.”

“He was my father,” said Dashwood.

“What!” cried Frank.

“It is true; you are like him too,” he continued. “I remembered the name, as the name of a sister of my father, whom he had not forgiven for marrying a man in trade: though the trade was that of banker, I believe.”

“Yes,” said Frank.

“I enquired of Saville who your father was—he told me: I knew that I was right. Of course I could not divulge this, except on my death-bed, without revealing the stain of my own birth. Now —”

Here he paused, exhausted. Frank saw too that he was spitting dark blood from his internal wound.

“For God’s sake! let me call in the doctor,” he cried, rising.

“No, no, not yet,” said the sick man; “bring me that paper,” he added, pointing to a table.

Frank did as he was told.

“Read it.” Frank opened it, and saw that it was Dashwood’s will. It named him, Frank Nugent, his sole heir, except a provision for his servant Evans.

“*That* is the act of justice I told you of,” said Dashwood, more faintly than ever.

“It is more, it is more than justice!” cried Frank, much moved, and in great surprise. But the appearance of Dashwood grew worse every moment. Without waiting for permission, Frank hastened to the door and called in the doctor.

As he entered the room a fresh gush of black blood rushed forth from Dashwood’s lips. Frank hid his eyes for a moment. The dying man’s face was almost livid now—he struggled, suddenly as if in sharp agony. “Flora! Flo—ra!” he muttered in broken tones; the sound died away; the struggle ceased, and he lay motionless.

“Dead!” said the doctor, “quite dead!”

CHAPTER XVII.

WHEN Frank returned home on the day of Dashwood's death, he found great distress in the little Pentonville household. Mr. Marsden had been brought home with a broken head, and terribly frightened his wife and daughter. The doctor, who accompanied him, had, however, assured the good wife that "Captain" Marsden would soon recover. This had eased Mrs. Marsden's mind, and Fanny's also; but the constant repetition of the title of "captain" applied to her father, had aroused Fanny's curiosity.

"Why do you call papa captain?" she asked the surgeon.

"He calls himself so, I believe, does he not?"

was the reply. "At all events, Captain Marsden is the name written over his office."

"What office?" asked Mrs. Marsden, in surprise.

"His betting office—I beg pardon, his commission office," said the surgeon.

"Lor-a-mercy me!" cried Mrs. Marsden; "you don't mean to say he's got one!"

The surgeon saw that he had been indiscreet, and would have backed out of the dilemma, but Fanny would not let him; and so mother and daughter learnt, to their great sorrow, that Mr. Marsden kept a betting office. The surgeon, however, begged them not to say a word to Mr. Marsden on the subject at present, as quiet of mind and body was essential to his speedy recovery.

"I shall hate him—I know I shall!" exclaimed the poor wife: "to go and demean himself with a nasty low, vulgar, betting office! He'll be took up by the police some day, and sent to Botany Bay—I know he will; and I

shall have to take in washing, and you'll have to turn the mangle, Fanny, though you aint strong, but it can't be helped."

Poor Fanny was very unhappy too; and indeed she had not got over her tears when David Tonks came to pay a visit to the house. Mrs. Marsden's grief was at boiling point—she could not keep it in at all; so she confided the dreadful news to David before he had been two minutes in the house, though of course in the strictest confidence, as she wouldn't have it known to any body else for all the world. She afterwards entrusted the same fact to about twenty other people on precisely similar conditions, and then looked upon herself as a miracle of secrecy and caution.

"You should not give way to grief, Miss Fanny," said David, gently, after a time.

"It's such a dreadful disgrace," said Fanny, sobbing.

"It's no disgrace to you," said David. "How can anything be properly a disgrace to you which you have not done yourself?"

“It’s very kind of you to say so,” replied Fanny; “but other people won’t think that.”

“The people that *don’t* think so are not worth troubling your head about,” suggested David.

“But it’s my own father,” replied Fanny; “I shall be ashamed of my name.”

David thought Fanny had never looked more interesting than she did now; he felt dreadfully tempted to ask her to change the name she was ashamed of, but he had not the courage.

“What will Mr. Nugent think?” said Fanny, with a dreadful sigh.

Poor David! what a rebuff to his thoughts! Still harping on Frank Nugent! Most men would have felt inclined, at such a moment, to say, either aloud or to themselves, “—— Mr. Nugent!” but David was of milder temper than most men, so David only said that he was sure Mr. Nugent was too sensible and too kind-hearted to think ill of any one for their relations’ faults.

Not long after this assertion of David’s, Mr. Frank Nugent himself arrived. He did not, as

usual, look into the little parlour as he passed the door, and say a friendly word or two to those inside it, but he stalked straight up stairs to his own room.

“ I know he has heard of it, and he’s angry,” said Fanny.

“ Oh, no, he’s out of spirits just now,” said David.

“ Why ?” asked Fanny ; “ is he in love ?”

This was a very pointed question, and David, who could not tell a lie, said—

“ I’m afraid so.”

“ I guessed it long ago,” said Fanny, “ but you don’t mean to say that the lady has refused *him* ?” The idea seemed to Fanny impossible to realize.

“ I’m afraid so,” said David again.

It is not certain whether Fanny, in spite of her good-nature, did not feel more pleasure than surprise at his answer. At all events, the state of Fanny’s mind at the moment boded ill for poor David’s prospects.

“ I’ll go and see him,” said David : and he went up to Frank’s room.

When David learnt what had occurred, and the fortune which had fallen to Frank Nugent’s lot, he was so elated that he could not help uttering a cry of delight. But the moment afterwards, he felt as if he were shouting over another man’s corpse, and he was sorry for his sudden impulse.

To remove the effect of his words he turned the subject to Mr. Marsden, and the discovery of Mr. Marsden’s calling. Frank expressed little surprise.

“ I always suspected something of the kind,” he said ; “ but I am sorry that my suspicions are verified, for the sake of his wife and daughter. Now we can understand his object in talking to you about a fortune. Of course he wanted you to join him—perhaps to keep a branch office for him.”

“ Please, sir, a gentleman wants to see you,” said the servant.

“ Show him in.”

“ I’ll go,” said David : and he left the room as Tom Saville entered it.

“ Saville, my dear fellow, welcome,” said Frank, delighted to see him ; “ but you’re in mourning,” he added, observing Saville’s dress.

“ Yes—poor Ned is gone,” said Tom—or the Earl of Merton, as we must now call him. “ Did you not hear of his death ?”

“ No : I have not seen a newspaper for many days. When did he die ? ”

“ More than a fortnight ago. Poor Ned ! we were not the most affectionate of brothers in by-gone days, but on his death-bed he begged my pardon for his want of love, and so on, that I felt like a criminal myself, Frank ; and, upon my soul ! I would have sacrificed any number of years of my own life to have saved his at that moment. After all, the ties of blood must be very strong. We may renounce them, if we please, for a time, even for long years, but surely in the hour of death they will assert their

rights, and he must be ill at peace with his God who feels no love for his brother at such a moment! But let me talk of yourself; you look ill, and fagged, Frank."

"I have been beside a death-bed within an hour," replied Frank; "not such a one as you describe, though. It was awful!"

"Whose was it? any one I know?"

"Yes, Dashwood."

"Dashwood dead! and you with him!—what does it all mean?"

Frank related the whole history to him, and his friend was much shocked and much surprised, but pleased also, at Frank's fortune.

"It is very shocking to reflect on such a life as Dashwood's," he said, "but can we utterly condemn him? A man born predisposed to some fearful bodily disease we are not surprised at—medical science explains it, and we see in it one of the immutable laws of nature. A man born predisposed to vicious propensities we cannot understand; yet the case ought to be as simple

as the other. Dashwood was born, as he told you, an outcast—a bastard. Think of the knowledge of that stain constantly rankling in a proud heart, and stirring up evil passions ! Which of us can say that we should not have been the worse for it ? ”

“ We shall never distinguish right from wrong—I mean man’s responsibility for his good and his bad actions—if we carry out your arguments to their legitimate length,” replied Frank. “ We *must* condemn the evil, or there is no justice in the world.”

“ The evil—yes, but the evil-doer ? Well, Frank, we are getting to a complicated theme, so let us quit it. I have much more to ask you. Your wooing, my friend, how prospers it ? ”

“ Do not ask me,” replied Frank.

“ Nay, but I *must*,” said the Earl. “ Tell me the truth, and the whole truth ; for in these love affairs the most trifling thing is important. Some confounded mistake, I suppose, has set two people moping and making themselves

wretched, who would fly into each other's arms and be happy, if five minutes' explanation were afforded to them, and they could but give it plainly and sensibly."

"I fear the case is too serious for that," replied Frank, with a sorrowful shake of the head. "But I will tell you the whole history of what occurred the very day after your departure from Townley Park."

And Frank did so, honestly.

"But this is the very case for an explanation to set right," said the listener.

"Not at all; she knows everything, at least, her brother's version of it, and she is not likely to believe ours in preference."

"I don't agree with you, but I must think over it. We shall meet soon, I hope; I am still at my old quarters. Good bye, my dear fellow, and recollect that I have always prophesied success for you, and I do so still."

No sooner had his lordship departed than Mrs. Marsden ran into the room where Fanny was,

exclaiming, in a loud whisper that might have been heard on the second floor,—

“Who *do* you think that was, Fanny?”

“I don’t know, mamma.”

“It’s a lord—a real lord—a earl.”

“How do you know, mamma?” asked Fanny, not quite free from her mother’s superstition about a real live earl.

“I asked his footboy, or whatever you call him, that was holding his horse’s head, and he said his master was the Earl of Mercy, and he was only dressed like a gentleman!”

“How *should* he be dressed, mamma?” asked Fanny.

“How *can* you ask such questions, Fanny?” exclaimed Mrs. Marsden. “In course he wouldn’t wear his crown thing—what-do-you call it?”

“His coronet?” suggested Fanny.

“His coronet—yes, that’s it; in course he wouldn’t wear *that* in the street; indeed, I *do* believe it’s got a hole in the top, so he might take cold; but I should have thought he’d have wore

a star on his wescoat, or something of that sort. Why, I've seen your own papa smarter than *he* was."

"Wasn't he in mourning, mamma?"

"Lor bless me! so he was. That's the reason why he hadn't his star, Fanny. He might have had one of jet, though, mightn't he? How's any one to know he's a lord if he doesn't?"

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE same lawyer who attended to Frank's affairs, connected with Dashwood's will, had very soon afterwards a new client in the person of Mr. David Tonks, to whom Mr. Marsden, after his recovery, forthwith revealed the secret of his inheritance, and placed the precious document securing it into his hands.

Frank was as much delighted at his poor friend's access of fortune as David had been in Frank's own case. They were neither quite satisfied with Mr. Marsden's account of his own possession of the will; for that gentleman told a very rigmorole tale about it. He must have had immense

confidence in the “verdancy” of his hearers, when he gravely assured them that the paper had been placed in his hand, as security for a loan, but that he was never informed what its contents were, and only discovered them by accident ; in fact, that he broke open the seals of the packet in which it was given to him, only when he feared that his money was insecure, and wanted to ascertain the value of the document deposited with him. It seemed so highly probable that a gentleman who kept a betting-office would lend his money on the security of a sealed-up paper. However, David having consulted with Frank on the subject, it was agreed that it would be as well to pretend to believe Mr. Marsden’s assertions, since the only really important thing was to secure his father’s property for David.

The solicitor apprehended considerable trouble on the subject. The widow had been long in possession of the property, under a will duly proved. She might declare that the one now produced was a forgery, and as at least one of the

attesting witnesses to it was dead, it might not be easy to prove its genuineness.

Things looked gloomier than they proved to be. The truth is, that Mr. Frisby, after having broken Mr. Marsden's head, rushed back to the village of Haslop, and, in the height of his alarm, told his bride all the history. Mrs. Frisby (late Tonks), finding that she had a husband whom she disliked, and was likely at the same time, and through his very means to lose all her property, flew into a tremendous passion, and called her loving spouse every ugly epithet that female indignation could invent, and so frightened Frisby, that he heartily wished himself single.

"There's one thing at all events," said the indignant lady; "you married me for my money, and you're served out. I'm a beggar now, and you must maintain me; and more than that, you'll have to go to prison for the arrears, as you call 'em, of the estate. I'm a married woman now, and they can't touch *me*."

Frisby groaned—he hadn't thought of that before.

“ But you see my dear,” he began—

“ Don't ‘ dear me ’—I hate you, and I always did hate you, and always shall—you're a nasty mean-spirited tailor of a fellow—that's what *you* are. I'm sure I wish you were still a *valley de sham*, instead of *my* husband.”

“ It's no use scolding,” said Frisby mildly. “ The best thing we can do is to scrape together all the money we can, and *bolt*, you know.”

“ I'm not going to bolt—thank you,” replied his wife. “ Nobody can touch me. As for the money, *I*ll take care of that. I was fool enough to let you have one hundred pounds, but you won't get another sixpence—*that* I tell you.”

“ The money's mine,” roared Frisby, getting into a rage which overcame his cowardice.

“ No it *aint*, it's David's, thanks to you and your nice friend Mr. Marsden. I should like to serve *him* out.”

“ I broke his head,” said Frisby.

“ I wish he had broken yours too,” rejoined his spouse.

“ Will you give me up the money ?” screamed Frisby, in a greater passion than ever.

“ No, I won’t !” she cried in the same tone.

Frisby caught up the bellows, and flung them at her head. Fortunately he missed her, but she screamed “ murder.” The neighbours rushed in—Frisby was handed over to a constable, and a few hours later he was locked up, for want of bail to keep the peace towards his wife.

Next morning Mrs. Frisby was nowhere to be found. She had “ bolted,” as her husband called it, and taken the money and every small article of value in the house, leaving Frisby to be served with all the legal notices by the solicitor of the new claimant to the property. Frisby thought it best to effect a compromise, so he offered to make no opposition, if they would let him off accounting for the arrears. David at once consented to this, and even promised to pay his step-mother her annuity, or her husband

for her. And thus David's affairs went smoothly, and he found himself worth some three hundred a-year, which he certainly deserved better than most men.

Frank's monetary affairs were straightforward enough. Dashwood had left none but the most trifling debts, while his accounts had been kept with a regularity perfectly astonishing in a man of his profession and style. Among his papers was found a small sealed packet, unaddressed. Frank opened it, and found a most beautifully executed likeness in water-colours of Flora Danvers, done by Dashwood's own hand, and from memory.

Frank seized on it with joy; he seemed to value the treasure more than all the fortune he had gained. But stay, there was something within the paper enclosing it. He read the words—

“Let this be buried with me.”

For a moment he felt disinclined to obey the strange mandate; but no, it must be complied

with, though it cost him many a pang to part with the beautiful image of the beloved one.

“How strange a man this was!” thought Frank; “who would have believed that knew him, who would have believed that heard him tell his own history as I did, that this man could love with a devotion that the indifference, the hatred, the scorn of its object could not quench or diminish?”

He fulfilled the strange behest. He consigned the beautiful portrait to the coffin of him who, inspired by love, had executed it so faithfully; and he followed that coffin to the grave, the chief, almost the sole mourner, of the man who had been the courted guest of the gay, the wealthy, and the noble, and yet who had died leaving not one friend to weep over his grave. Yes, there was one—his faithful servant followed also, and when the funeral rites were over, he exclaimed, as the tears rolled down his face—

“Heaven rest him! he was always the poor man’s friend!”

“That shall be his epitaph,” said Frank ; “ it is, indeed, a noble one.”

A few days after Frank had performed this last duty to his kinsman, he received a visit from the Earl of Merton.

“Have you heard the news?” he asked.

“About what?” said Frank.

“About the Danvers?”

“No.”

“What is it?” cried Frank, eagerly.

“Lionel is dead, for one thing,” said the earl.

“Lionel Danvers dead!”

“Yes ; it appears that he has been over in France ever since his duel with Dashwood ; he was seized with the cholera, which is raging in Paris, and was dead in eighteen hours afterwards.”

“How fearful!” exclaimed Frank. “Poor Flora!” His first thought was for her, for he knew well how she would mourn her brother’s loss. “And myself, too,” he continued ; “does it not seem dreadful that the only two men

against whom I can recollect to have felt one spark of enmity in my life, should both be in their graves—both indirectly through each other's means ; and yet a month ago each was in the full swing of life, with health and youth, and a thousand joyous things within their grasp."

"It is strange, at least," said the Earl.

"When did the news arrive?" asked Frank.

"Only to-day," was the reply ; "I heard it from Mowbray, whom I met in Pall Mall. He told me other news, Frank. I don't know whether I ought to repeat it to you, yet I think it will be kinder to do so."

"Tell me! tell me!" said Frank ; "but I can almost anticipate it."

"He said that Flora Danvers is betrothed to him."

"I knew it—I knew it—I *felt* that it was that," cried Frank, and he fell back in his chair, overcome by his emotions.

His friend looked on with real sympathy, and almost regretted that he had revealed the truth.

“No, no, it is better as it is,” cried Frank ;
“I now know the worst. The last faint ray of
hope is gone for ever.”

“Not so, Frank ; even now you must not
despair. There may be some mistake at the
bottom of all this.”

“Mistake ! when the man himself tells you
the fact ? Oh, no, it is too true. Such love as
mine for Flora Danvers never yet was crowned
with happiness.”

“Frank, you may learn a lesson even from
poor Dashwood. Think how *he* defied fate when
it had destroyed *his* hopes even more certainly
than your own. At least, his courage to the
last was worthy of imitation.”

“Do not fear for me, my dear Merton,” said
Frank, after a pause. “You shall not find me a
coward. I will strive to show you how a man
may live when Hope itself has gone.”

“No, I shall *not* see that,” replied the Earl,
“for you know my obstinacy on that point—

there is no life *without* Hope. But do not brood on the one subject, Frank. Grief grows by nursing. By the way, I called on the St. Legers yesterday, and had a chat with madame."

"Are they in town?"

"Yes—and surprised to have seen nothing of Mr. Frank Nugent."

"I will go there to-morrow—or soon," said Frank.

The friends then parted, and in the evening, Frank, who had at last quitted his old Pentonville quarters, had a call from David Tonks.

"Why, David, you look ill," he exclaimed.

"So do you," replied David.

"Yes—perhaps so; but what is the matter with you?" asked Frank.

"No more than I deserve, said David, bitterly. "I might have guessed how it would be—I am refused——"

"What has Fanny——?"

"Yes——" replied David, "yes."

"Indeed, I grieve for you, David, and God

knows I can sympathise with you at this moment, more than ever."

"How so?" asked David, "have you heard anything of Miss——?"

"Yes—she is going to be married."

David hung his head, and felt scarcely less sorrow for his friend than for himself.

"It is not many months," said Frank, after a pause, "since you and I, David, sat together in your poor garret, and confided our sorrows and our hopes. You were then poor, very poor—I was penniless. We thought we wanted only wealth to make us happy. We have both all the wealth we need now. Are we happier than in that hour of our poverty?"

"No," replied David.

"No," echoed Frank. "Yet I will not be disheartened—I will defy fate."

"Bow to it, rather," said David, "for is not fate, God?"

CHAPTER XIX.

ON the morrow, Frank Nugent paid his visit to Mrs. Townley St. Leger, and apologized for his neglect to do so before.

“I had no idea that you would be in town at this season of the year,” he said.

“Nor should we under ordinary circumstances have been so,” replied the lady. “But our party at Townley Park was so broken up and dispersed, and such a fatality seemed to attend nearly every one of it, that I was sick of the country altogether. Is it not dreadful to think of the mischances that have happened since you first joined us? Captain Dashwood killed—Lionel Danvers dead—Mr. Saville’s brother dead.

Poor Flora broken-hearted from many causes, and yourself, I suppose, not happy, in spite of your accession to fortune."

"Indeed, not," answered Frank, with a sigh, "But you speak of Miss Danvers as broken-hearted from *many* causes—has she any other cause of grief than the death of her brother?"

"Yes—Do you not know?—but I am afraid I am very imprudent, and I shall henceforth write myself down as the most dangerous of gossips. I fear I have done a great deal of mischief—though unwittingly enough."

"I do not know why you should say so," replied Frank. At all events, you can do no harm by giving me any news concerning Miss Danvers; for I do not mind confessing to *you*, that I take deep interest in all that concerns her, in spite of the past."

"In consequence of it, rather, you ought to say," rejoined the lady. "Well, then, I will tell you, if you do not already know it—Flora Danvers is betrothed to Gerard Mowbray."

“ I have heard of that,” said Frank, “ but I was not aware that a betrothal was the source of a broken-heart.”

“ Not when the betrothal is made against the wishes of the person most interested in it ?”

“ But surely no one can force Miss Danvers in such a matter ?”

“ I answer that it has been done. At this moment the heart of Flora Danvers is utterly estranged from Gerard Mowbray. The worst is that he knows it, and yet he is content to take a wife without affection.”

“ You speak enigmas,” said Frank. “ I cannot understand *why* or by whom Miss Danvers should be betrothed against her will.”

“ By her father ; because he is greatly involved, and Gerard Mowbray has lent him money on security which no disinterested person would have accepted.”

“ This is frightful—pardon me, my dear Mrs. St. Leger, but is it not infamous to sell a daughter thus ?”

“ *I* think so : but the father’s arguments are specious. Mowbray is well-born, talented, young, handsome, and rich. What *can* a girl object to in such a man ? Meanwhile, her rejection of him would place her father at Mowbray’s mercy, and I tell you again that man has no heart.”

“ Do you know the extent of Colonel Danvers’ obligation to Mr. Mowbray ?”

“ Report says ten thousand pounds.”

“ Had it not been for that fatal duel, *I* might have earned the right to release the Colonel from his obligation.”

Mrs. St. Leger was silent for a moment.

“ Let me speak to you of that duel,” she said. “ The Earl of Merton gave me the full history of it—surely you were not in fault ?”

“ I cannot accuse myself of being so,” replied Frank.

“ And *that* was the sole cause of your rupture with Flora Danvers, and your sudden departure from Townley ?”

“ I know of no other.”

“ I thought otherwise—indeed much against my inclination I *believed* otherwise,” said the lady.

“ How so? what can you mean?” said Frank.

“ Was there no allusion to a lady in the case? Pardon me, for I have no right to force your confidence; but I was taught to believe that your affections were, or had been engaged elsewhere.”

“ Good Heaven! what can this mean?” cried Frank. “ I must have been basely slandered by some villain. I wish I knew who it is that has thus ruined me.”

“ That you might fight another duel,” said the lady smiling. “ Oh, Mr. Nugent, there has been bloodshed enough already—think of the two duels that have occurred in our own little circle within a few short months. One of them has ruined your hopes—the other has ended in the death of both engaged in it.”

“ You are right; but surely you could not preach forbearance to me under such a wrong as this.”

“ What if the wrong-doer has already atoned for that, and every other misdeed ? ”

“ Dashwood ? ” asked Frank eagerly.

“ No ; Lionel Danvers,” replied the lady. “ Stay ! ” she continued as he was about to speak. “ On whose account did you fight with him ? ”

“ He was insulting Fanny Marsden in the street, and I released her,” said Frank.

“ Your landlady’s daughter ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ I fear this has been misrepresented. Flora confided to me something of your parting scene with her : but I am your advocate. I pointed out to her the injustice of throwing on you the whole blame of a duel into which you might have been forced. I found it difficult to make her take this view of it ; but when I began to prevail, I was met with a still worse obstacle. She told me that the duel was about a woman, and it was clearly *that* which wrung her heart. I was dumb then, for what *could* I say ? ”

“ Dear Mrs. St. Leger you have been the most generous of friends to me—the *only* friend I had in the hour of need. I owe every thing I have to you, and if I have lost what I shall value ten thousand times more than all, it is not through you. I vow to you most solemnly that I never gave my affections to any one save to Flora Danvers, and how I loved her God and myself can alone know. If Lionel Danvers intentionally represented this poor Fanny Marsden as anything else in my eyes than a helpless girl exposed to his insults, Heaven pardon him for a foul slander, which has left me at three and twenty a man without Hope!”

“ I believe you—from my soul I believe you, my good friend,” said Mrs. St. Leger, taking his hand and shaking it warmly. “ I will not try to console you, the task would be beyond my powers, and I am not vain enough to hope for success in it. But I have one other point to speak to you on. I do not deserve the title of your only friend in the hour of your need.

Do you recollect receiving fifty pounds anonymously ? ”

“ Yes,” cried Frank, eagerly.

“ Can you not divine from whence it came ? Did it never cross your mind that Lord Merton—noble-hearted Tom Saville, as you called him—sent it ? ”

“ How could he know where I was ? ”

“ From me,” was the reply.

“ Yet he never came to see me.”

“ Not till you met him here, otherwise his secret might have been guessed. *I* have long guessed it, but so long as the knowledge of it could only pain you, as you had no means of requiting it, I refrained from telling you.”

“ I feel that you are right,” replied Frank. “ Dear, generous, Tom Slack—the same now as in boyhood.”

“ What are your plans ? ” asked Mrs. St. Leger; “ do you remain in town ? ”

“ No, within a week I am off to the Conti-

nent, and I hope never to set foot in England again for many a long year."

"The unhappy always quarrel with their country," said Mrs. St. Leger.

"No, but they fly from it, when it is like a home with the associations that make home dear all destroyed."

Fresh visitors were announced at this moment, and Frank Nugent bade farewell to Mrs. Townley St. Leger.

CHAPTER XX.

FOR a solitary man there is no more delightful city than Florence. There is a quiet air about the place itself, in spite of its gaiety, that is soothing to the spirits. Then there are the magnificent old churches, with their beautiful works of art, to admire ; and, after all, there are few places where one can pass a contemplative half hour more profitably than in one of these Christian temples. It matters not whether a man be Protestant or Catholic, so that he be not a bigot, to what form of religion is dedicated the temple in which he stands. Enough that it is dedicated to the Great God—Jehovah, Jove, or Lord,—that it is reared for the worship of the

Author of the universe : such a reflection alone is sufficient to raise high and holy thoughts in the mind of him who stands within it, to repress for awhile the troublous ideas of every day of existence, to pour balm into the wounded spirit, and make man forget the petty ills of life as he rises above them in his contemplation of the Deity. We cannot understand the nature of that man's heart who has experienced none of these sensations as he has wandered through the grey old churches of Italy.

But Florence has other charms for the contemplative man of taste—the noble galleries of painting and sculpture. Surely one might live for years in such a city almost without exchanging a word with our fellow men. Solitude ! Can there be solitude amidst such scenes, such living, speaking likenesses of the great and the beautiful, such realizations of the poet's dream, the saint's belief, the history of past ages, the scenery of the world's gardens ? Amid such noble works of art, who could feel solitude in his heart ?

Can he not converse with kings and heroes, wander in the vales of Arcady, pray with the first saints of the holy Church, admire the loveliness of the deification of beauty itself? Next to the enthusiasm of religion surely there is nothing that can so transport us to an ideal world of rest from the actual one of pain, as a gallery of beautiful and varied paintings. Even poetry itself is less powerful to such an end—that is *written* poetry,—for there is as true poetry in the works of Raphael and Titian as in the strains of Homer and the lays of Petrarch.

It was winter—some four months after the time of our last chapter—and Frank Nugent was a dweller in the city of Dante and Michael Angelo. He had passed through France, he had visited Genoa and Milan, and at last had fixed his residence in Florence. He found himself enchanted with the intellectual banquet it offered him, in spite of the dull appetite he had brought to it. The winter season in Florence is gay enough to please the veriest reveller, and never have we

One day, Frank had taken up one of his favourite positions in the Pitti Palace to look for the fiftieth time at a Giorgione, a female face, in the features and expression of which the poor lover fancied he traced a resemblance to Flora Danvers. Surely he had learnt every line of that face by heart ; and yet he could gaze on it again and again, and find some new beauty to admire in it.

His thoughts were suddenly distracted by the voice of a very voluble Italian gentleman addressing a lady by his side. When the gentleman ceased speaking, the lady replied ; but alas ! it was a terrible onslaught she made on the pure Tuscan. The voice struck Frank ; surely it was one he knew—yes ! it must be Lady Emily Danvers.

He turned and saw Lady Emily Danvers indeed, and by her side was Flora Danvers also. The recognition was mutual. Frank was half-stupefied at the sudden and unexpected apparition ; but recovering himself, he was just raising

his hand to lift his hat in a formal bow, when Flora held out her hand to him. He certainly did not hesitate to seize it on the instant, and probably the thrill of pleasure that shot through his frame as he did so will remain in Frank Nugent's memory, though he live to ever so green an old age.

"Mr. Nugent, I am delighted to see you," cried Lady Emily. "I had not the least idea that you were in Italy."

"I have not been very communicative with my friends in England," said Frank. "I don't think any one there is aware of my being here. And you—have you been long here?"

"Only two days," replied Lady Emily.

"The Colonel, I presume, is with you?"

Lady Emily looked shocked, and poor Flora turned away her head.

"I beg your pardon," said Frank, in great embarrassment—"I fear—have I —."

"You have not heard of my father's death?" said Flora, in a faint voice.

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"You have not heard of my father's death?" said Flora, in a faint voice.

“ Indeed I have not,” he replied ; “ when did he — ?”

“ Two months ago,” said Flora, before he could finish his sentence. “ A disease of the heart carried him off suddenly. Neither mamma nor I have been very well since, and we were advised to try Italy for a change of scene.”

“ Will you come home, and dine with us Mr. Nugent?” said Lady Emily, who had been talking to her Italian companion during the above little colloquy. “ Abroad we may take these liberties of impromptu invitations.” Poor Lady Emily—she could not forget May Fair even in the Palazzo Pitti of Florence.

“ With pleasure,” replied Frank.

“ Do you know many people here?” asked Flora.

“ No one. I live a life of utter solitude.”

There was something in the tones of Frank’s voice that expressed more than the mere words. No doubt he meant Flora to *feel* that there was

more ; but she did not reply either to the words or the tone.

“ The gallery is almost deserted to-day, is it not ? ” she asked.

“ Yes ; but it is generally so about this hour. ”

“ Flora, dear, I must rest a little while, ” said Lady Emily, taking a seat ; her Italian friend remained by her side.

“ Do you wish to sit down ? ” asked Frank to Flora—“ will you walk on ? Lady Emily we will walk on, and return to you, ” he said, reading Flora’s assent before she spoke.

“ You do not hear much from England ? ” said Flora.

“ Never, ” he replied.

“ Then perhaps you have not heard of your friend Lord Merton’s engagement ? ”

“ Lord Merton’s ! no, to whom ? ”

“ To a very dear friend of mine. ” replied Flora. “ Lady Jane Fenton. When I tell you that I do not know her equal in every thing we

ought to value most, I think you will even admit that she may be worthy of your friend."

"Indeed I do ; and yet she can hardly be too good for him."

"You ought to praise him," said Flora, "for surely no brother ever loved another more than he does you."

Frank felt a delightful glow on hearing these words, less because of his friend's affection, perhaps, than because Flora Danvers spoke the words which bore witness to it.

"And the St. Legers?" asked Frank.

"They are well ; and dear Mrs. St. Leger the same amiable, impulsive, warm-hearted woman as ever."

Frank was dying to ask another question, but he dared not. It seemed horrible, directly after he had first heard of her father's death, to allude to the prospect of her own marriage. And yet the anxiety, and the doubt, and the dread he felt upon the subject kept him in a nervous tremor, which made him ill at ease by her side.

At last he made a desperate effort to appear calm, as he said—

“There is another mutual acquaintance of whom you have told me nothing?”

“Whom do you mean?” asked Flora, innocently enough; but the instant the words had left her lips, she felt to whom Frank had referred, and a crimson flush overspread her features.

“Mr. Mowbray,” said Frank, and every syllable of his form trembled as if Frank were in an ice-house.

“He has gone to India, I believe.”

“What!” exclaimed Frank, in so loud a voice, that two men at a considerable distance turned round, and one of them put up his glass and took a deliberate survey of the pair.

“He has gone to India,” answered Flora, repeating her own words; but Flora knew well what was passing in her companion’s mind, and she trembled so, that she could scarcely stand.

“For God’s sake, tell me!” said Frank, in a low whisper now, but earnest as if his very ex-

istence beyond that moment depended on the answer. "Are you not betrothed to him?"

"No," was the faint reply; so faint, that had not Frank's ear been lowered close to his fair companion's face, it could hardly have caught the sound.

"Oh, for pity's sake, tell me!" he cried, pressing still closer to her side; "have I been all along misinformed?"

"My father's death left me free," said Flora; "you can understand."

"Yes, yes," said Frank, hastily. "Stay—let us sit here—you look pale."

They sat side by side, and in silence. Flora was, indeed, pale as death, and Frank scarcely less so. "Oh, for inspiration to ask all I wish to know in one word," he thought.

"Flora," he whispered at length; she moved not, and spoke not a word. "Flora, tell me—answer me but one question—am I forgiven?"

"There was nothing to forgive," said Flora; "or it is *I* who should ask forgiveness."

How like heavenly music those words fell upon the youth's ear, and yet he was not *quite* satisfied. He had asked her to answer but *one* question—he found that there was yet another. How he asked it we do not know ; we doubt if it be always asked in mere words ; there are looks and glances, half-murmured sounds, faint pressures of the hand, and a thousand things unnameable, that make up the sum of that momentous question, far more than the words themselves. No matter — the answer was, “ Yes ! ”

If Lady Emily thought Frank a wonderfully altered man that day at dinner, and even entertained doubts of his sober sanity, we must not be surprised ; nor if Flora struck her as wandering in her thoughts, and strangely absent when addressed by her. Later in the evening, when the room was cleared of servants, and the trio were alone, Frank Nugent let Lady Emily into the secret, as he was bound to do, and, like a

dutiful son-in-law elect, asked her consent and her blessing.

Oh, the delicious hours that passed by ; no more in the delirium of young love's birth, with its crowds of hopes and fears, joys and doubts, jostling each other, and making the lover's heart a scene of alternate Elysium and misery, but in the calm, placid perfection of love returned, love at rest, love unbroken and undying !

The wedding of Frank Nugent and Flora Danvers was not a single one ; for at the same place, the same hour, and the same day, Lord Merton, the friend of the bridegroom, was united to Lady Jane Fenton, the loved companion of the bride. Four purer hearts scarcely ever, in this world of sin, plighted troth before the altar ; and to doubt that they enjoy every happiness earth can afford,

is to doubt the power of health, youth, beauty, wealth, intellect, and virtue.

A few words more for some of our old friends who have played their little parts in our drama.

David Tonks—honest, single-hearted, devoted David Tonks, was rewarded at length with the hand of Fanny Marsden—aye, and with the heart, too; and Fanny loves her husband now as well as if she had never thought by day and dreamt by night of another.

Mrs. Marsden lives, and thinks her son-in-law the best man in existence; and to this day remembers, as one of the glories of her life, that her house was visited by a real live lord, the “Earl of Mercy.”

Mr. Marsden has gone to the diggings, and has not been heard of. The ticket holders of the last “Derby” are very much grieved at his absence, but no one else.

Frisby and his wife, who returned to him when she found her annuity secured, live a “cat-and-dog” life, as they deserve.

Mrs. St. Leger lives, unchanged in heart and person. That she may long do so is the sincere wish of her husband, and of him who pens these pages.

THE END.

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